University of Alberta

The Destiny of Freedom in Technological-Consumer Culture

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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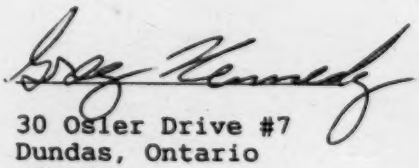

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Destiny of Freedom in Technological-Consumer Culture submitted by Gregory Kennedy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

This thesis raises the question of freedom and determinism within the context of modern technological society. More specifically, it examines the extent of individual freedom in the consumption of technologically produced commodities. Albert Borgmann's theory of the device provides the initial language and concepts necessary for establishing a determinative link between technology and consumer culture. Borgmann's theory is then situated in the larger ontological interpretation of history as expressed by Martin Heidegger. The disengaging aspects of the device are shown to be aggravating symptoms of the forgetfullness of Being. Borgmann's project for a reform of technology is criticized from the historical perspective, while Heidegger's notion of art as a cure to the danger of technology is elaborated. The question of freedom becomes the question of understanding the truth of technology.

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Introduction

As with all strains of determinism, the technological variants bear the initial burden of proof. Against them speaks the incontrovertible evidence of experience. We, makers and users of technology, in our daily practice of, as Thoreau put it, 'getting a living' decide when, where and whether we make and use the sundry technological artifacts that surround us. Most of these decisions, to be sure, remain unconscious, made more from rote than from deliberation. But the grey Orwellian morn has yet to dawn when the telescreens simple do not shut off. Nothing compels the average Canadian to watch some twenty-three hours of television per week.[1] Each is free to decline the invitation to easy entertainment anxiously extended by competing programmers.

Prima facie, and at the most personal level, the notion of technological determinism seems unfounded. It can betray an alarmist, reactionary element in its proponents. It can also betray, as philosopher Albert Borgmann points out, a certain arrogance and presumption. To claim that technology, whatever this now sorely hackneyed word describes, arrogates the capacity of individuals for making decisions and thus assuming responsibility for their

actions is more than a little patronizing. This claim offends our sensibilities as readily as do the vaunts of some advertisers, who like to fancy themselves as shepherds leading, wheresoever they please, utterly docile sheep. Borgmann uses the term 'complicity' to express our personal relations with technology. No matter how convenient it may be, we cannot in good faith deny our participation in the shaping of our technological lives. If these should perchance leave us feeling dissatisfied, alienated, even on occasion exploited, we attain little relief by making scapegoats out of advertisers or the great nebula called 'technology'.

A technological determinism that removes all traces of personal automony and instates technology as the single decisive force at work in history, society and daily life must appear crude and false in light of our experience. Yet experience also forces us to question the extent of our freedom and complicity within the technological order. If, for example, the city we inhabit was designed specifically to accomodate the presence and movement of private automobiles, with the result that business, residential and commercial areas developed far removed from each other, without adequate public transportation to connect them, then short of taking heroic measures we will find it necessary to own and drive a car. Even individual heroic acts of abstinence, however, will do nothing to change the dehumanizing effects of assembly-line production begun by Ford; will not alter the fact that, at least in the United States, one out of every six non-agricultural jobs is tied

to the automotive industry[2]; will send at best an imperceptible ripple across the oceanic world economy dominated by the price of oil. Since industrial production and wage labour mold the capitalist society, shaping in turn the private lives therein; and insofar as the economy has usurped politics so that both foreign and domestic policy float (or sink), as it were, on oil, one rightly begins to wonder just who actually occupies the socio-historical driver's seat. Recalling that a single artifact can within one century so thoroughly permeate a culture and, moreover, harbour grander aspirations on a global scale, we begin to hear the bandied phrase 'autonomous technology' with greater attention.

When Dostoyevsky's underground man proclaims with proud defiance that he would thrust needles into his arm simply to assert his freedom, he presumes to speak, albeit somewhat perversely, for every human being. His particular contention was with the Enlightenment project to render all human action, thought and emotion as rational, thus predictable and thus determinable. He vociferously embodies the fact that humans do not part lightly with their free agency. If an awareness, however dim and ill-conceived, were to exist that technology exerts a determinative force upon culture and consequently ourselves, then in light of this threat to human freedom, one could expect to see similar signs of rebellion. Exactly this we find. As the advance of technology appears ever more inevitable--even if this advance be considered beneficial--, as the concept of technological determinism roots deeper in the

collective consciousness, increasing effort is spent on attempts to enshrine a sphere of inviolable individual freedom. Freedom, popularly defined, equals the unencumbered power to choose for oneself. Nowhere is the concept of individual choice more sacred than in the free market consumer society.

A connection between technological determinism and consumerism is thus revealed. This connection, however, has not yet shown itself to be made directly by technological objects. As suggested above, it is the popular apprehension of technological progress as an independent force, rather than technology itself that could perhaps issue consumer culture. On this account, the determining force remains cultural rather than mechanical, resulting from human feelings of social impotence. Consumer culture promises to guarantee its members the exercise of their freedom through choice by throwing open a seemingly inexhaustible storehouse of commodities. Once inside, the consumer encounters nothing save the surpassable inconvenience of limited liquid capital to restrict her choices. As the possible reaction to widespread feelings of social helplessness, consumer culture seems to have nothing to do with technology per se. Benjamin Constant long ago exposed to the substitutive nature of the relief that private pleasures win for a population divested of the power of meaningful self-direction and governance[3]. When the size and complexity of nations deny the individual the joys of direct political participation so cherished by the ancient Athenians, then these joys must be sought elsewhere. That elsewhere becomes the realm of private

consumption, the last bastion of individual freedom and control.

Apart from the tacit assumption that mass society requires a certain level of material sophistication in order to arise and endure, technology plays no role in Constant's early observations on the evolution of consumer culture. This would suggest that it is not a necessary condition. Of course much weighs on the definitions of technology and consumer culture. If the far-flung highly bureaucratic and architecturally accomplished Roman Empire is considered thoroughly technological in the way, for example, Lewis Mumford regards it, then the infamous hedonism and proto-consumerism rampant during the period of its decline may indeed point to a necessary connection between technology and consumption. Although often instructive, mitigating the differences between historical epochs in this manner does not do full justice the uniqueness of our own time and social configuration. The matter is not merely one of quantity, such that today we simply have more ostensible, sophisticated 'technology' and that simply a greater portion of humanity lives the consumer life-style. Much more, the difference, as the following pages will seek to show, is ontological.

This difference first becomes visible when we move beyond standard, dictionary definitions in search of a definition more attuned to our experiences. In his important book Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life, Albert Borgmann offers this working definition of technology: it is the current way in which we take up with reality. This peculiar,

seemingly empty description grows, upon reflection, quite pointed. How do most members of a consumer society, for example, come to learn about their environment? Not primarily through the direct report of their senses, but rather they experience their surroundings for the most part through the mediation of machines. The radio, not the sky, tells the weather; the clock, not the sun, tells the time of day; the x-ray, the blood-test, the DNA analysis, not the sensations of our bodies, tell our state of health. We understand our situation and ourselves by means and in terms of the many technological devices that now fill our lives. Nothing evidences this fact better than present day language. The human mind seldom thinks of late; it more often computes or processes information. Colleagues no longer gather to confer, instead they interface and network. The human body is hardwired, programmed and engineered to produce outputs that correspond to the inputs entered.

There is more to all this than merely the play of metaphor. We comprehend reality through technology, but what makes this possible is our prior comprehension of reality as something technological. Here Borgmann's definition integrates the more common ones. Webster's New Collegiate defines technology as the "totality of the means employed to provide objects necessary for human sustenance and comfort". Yet the earth, the air, the sea and the entirety of what is appears to us as, if not the instruments themselves, then at least instrumental to the securing of our sustenance and comfort. Everything, humans included, is a

resource. Modern science has made astounding progress in its reductive project of dissecting all phenomena into mechanical, repeatable procedures. Miracles, gods and shamans, whose existence modern science cannot explain, are frauds beneath its microscopes and thus in a strict sense do not exist. So too does the existence of all entities depend on how they conform to the dictates of modern science. Modern science, for its own part, exists to serve the will and security of humanity. Thus science, as instrument, reveals all beings as instruments. Technology--the contemporary manner in which we experience and understand--demands an ontological definition, for technology determines what actually counts as a being within modern reality. To be is to be explicable and manipulable by the scientific will.

Of course manipulability was not always an important ontological property, never mind the cornerstone. Throughout history numerous different conceptions of the basis of being have enjoyed greater or lesser currency. One thinks of the Platonic doctrine that to be is to imitate the perfection of the Forms, or the generic theological approach that says to be is essentially to be somehow sustained through the power and goodness of God. These various understandings of being make possible the varying historical sets of essential characteristics of phenomena. Things appear as imperfect facsimiles or finite representations of infinite substance according to the underlying conception of being. Yet despite the differences of these conceptions, entities always, by virtue of their being, are in

some sense the same; they all share existence. So it seems that being, which unifies all entities, both changes and remains unchanged. The way out of this contradiction is to think of Being not as a property somehow possessed of entites, but as the historical movement of changing ontological conceptions itself. German philosopher Martin Heidegger devoted his life to the elaboration of this unorthodox notion of Being. As the context of meaning through which entities appear as such, Being is the whole series of the changing understandings of what entities in essence are. These understandings allow beings to be by setting out the ontological criteria for existence. Today we understand that which is technologically. To this extent technology is ontological. On the other hand, Borgmann's peculiar definition of technology holds only for the modern era. Previous epochs did not take up with reality as something primarily instrumental, explicable and manipulable. Many epochs encountered it as sacred, mysterious and unalterable. Thus to the extent that technology is ontological, ontology, in turn, is historical. This would make modern consumerism the ontology of technology in daily practice.

The study of consumer culture, then, does not belong strictly to the domain of sociology. Nor do economics, psychology and newly emerging disciplines, like human ecology, exhaust the possibilities of study. There remains the philosophical inquiry, which attempts to interpret not only the findings of these other disciplines, but presses on more deeply to question their basic assumptions. This inquiry approaches

history as the manifold ways through which Being comes to pass. Philosophy itself, it will be shown, makes up part of this manifold. History and philosophy are thus inseperable.

Without here settling the question as to the necessary relation between technology and consumer culture, we may still ask whether technology is not sufficient for creating the latter. It is indeed the question of sufficiency that first raises the specter of technological determinism. If technology per se, and not just a popular fatalism vis-a-vis it, suffices to precipitate a culture of consumption, then the strict notion of technological determinism, i.e., that technology of itself exerts determinative power over, above and upon its human makers, acquires plausibility.

Despite his many reminders concerning the complicity of individuals in promulgating the technological order, and despite, furthermore, his critique of harder, deterministic accounts, Borgmann nonetheless maintains a kind of technological determinism. His theory of the device paradigm attempts to show a causal relation between technology and consumer culture. Borgmann's determinism rests in the unique ontological features of technological devices. His account proves helpful for explaining the contradictions of personal experience within the technological order. For while every individual remains free to choose whether and how to consume this or that particular consumer good, no one has the power to alter the consumable nature of commercial goods in general. Thus for members of the

technological society, freedom of choice extends only over what to consume and not whether to consume. Here consumption assumes a fairly specific meaning; it denotes usage of a technological device that requires minimal skill, understanding, discipline and attachments to particular contexts of place and use. Borgmann's account convincingly explains how this peculiarly modern style of commerce with entities springs from the ontology of the device.

Absent from this account, however, is an attempt to think through how the ontological class of entity called the device came into being. Although Borgmann affirms the historical and ontological uniqueness of the device, he does not offer to situate it in what Martin Heidegger called the 'history of Being' (Seingeschichte). Lessons in this strange history have the same value as more conventional history lessons. They help make sense of the present by interpretting the past, which together open up a future for meaningful action. Lessons in conventional history can make at best only partial sense of our technological situation because they fail to recognize technology as a way of understanding beings, or what is the same, a way in which beings appear. A history of Being addresses the ontological essence of technology.

Strictly speaking, Heidegger cannot be called a technological determinist, since he thinks technology itself is just the latest moment in the historical movement of Being, whose movement as a whole exerts the determinative force on history. Appellations notwithstanding, Heidegger often comes across as an

absolute fatalist in surrendering human will and agency to the historical play of Being. If Borgmann declines from mounting grand Heideggerian histories (some would rather call them histrionics) it is for reasons of their complexity, interminability, but also of their presumed rigidity. Borgmann believes that engaging, world-revealing things, as opposed to throwaway commodities, can indeed flourish within the technological order. Far from being a necessarily exclussive totality, technology can, when properly limited, provide a setting conducive to the attendance of meaningful things and careful practices. Whereas Heidegger feels that it best behooves humans to somehow pass beyond technology, Borgmann fits the human good life squarely within the technological order.

Still, for all his seeming fatalism and distaste for modernity, Heidegger never espouses a blind renouncement of technology, nor a mute queitism. His life-long task to think through and question Being was devoted to allowing the truth of Being to occur. Thinking the history of Being opens up its true present. From a Heideggerian standpoint, until we think the device within the Seingeschichte, we will never learn what it truly is, let alone how appropriately to relate to it.

Starting then from Borgmann's device paradigm, the pages that follow chart an attempt to understand this paradigm and its relation to consumer culture in a larger ontological historical context. The attempt answers Borgmann's own challenge that students of Heidegger and technology propagate his important and seminal thoughts so that they branch out in

directions which Heidegger himself could not have foreseen. Owing to his earlier time and European location, Heidegger did not confront and therefore did not respond to the same kind of frenzied consumerism that reigns over North America today. Like technology, the cult of consumption seems destined to become catholic. This aspiration makes urgent a host of already pressing concerns. These range from the utterly physical--an estimated three to four planet Earths would be required to sustain the current global population at North American consumption levels[4]--to the ethical--North Americans enjoy these high levels of consumption through the direct exploitation of the lands and peoples of poorer nations--and finally to the existential-ontological--once self-regarded as the stewards and guardians of creation, what are we now given that more and more of creation becomes disposable. If, as the device paradigm suggests, consumerism is a particular moment in the history of Being, the two must be thought out together to allow the truth of both to be. In the presence of this truth, we may then discover the true measure of our freedom.

Perhaps this measure will seem hopelessly short. After elaborating the suggestions within Borgmann's theory of the device that imply the connection between understanding and the human body, and the intersubjective nature of meaning, I introduce the theory to a Heideggerian interpretation of history. This interpretation, grossly simplified, reads Western history as the steady ascension of rational instrumental calculation over reflective thinking;

a movement which terminates in a kind of nihilistic meaninglessness. Technological devices, by distancing people from their own bodies and from others', are shown to be the necessary products and at the same time the producers of the meaninglessness of the ontological era to which they belong. I mark this era as one of consumption, because the entities that predominate and apparently fill it are goods defined primarily by their commercial value, i.e., commodities. Yet Borgmann holds that technology necessarily creates commodities, while Heidegger thinks that the current reign, or tyranny perhaps, of technology was long ago destiined to occur; to bring the two together, as this thesis does, would seem to foreclose all question of freedom within the consumer culture.

We need not, however, end before we begin. By recognizing the device as the instantiation of the ontological essence of the current epoch, we allow ourselves the possibility of approaching it more carefully than the usual headlong dash of restless consumers possibly could. Borgmann's device paradigm helps explain how the devices we use threaten the integrity of meaning. Heidegger's ontological history helps to make understandable why devices and their commodities would come to predominate the epoch. Together, then, the explicative and the descriptive-reflective theories of technology open up a space for freedom from consumption within the consumer culture. Exploring this freedom is the purpose of this thesis. Its first three chapters attempt to contextualize the device within the larger ontological history and thereby make it understandable. Guided

by this understanding, the final chapter concludes with some initial thoughts as to the way in which we may most freely practice it.

Although empirical and anecdotal evidence appear throughout this thesis, the latter makes no pretense of providing exhaustive factual commentary or analysis. As it is an attempt at better understanding our current ontological landscape, it helps itself freely to those facts which further this understanding, while leaving aside many others. The contemporary rate of technological and cultural change quickly renders antiquated any interpretation that relies too heavily on the minutiae of modernity. This interpretation seeks to avoid early obsolescence by taking, with Heidegger, the grand sweep of history.

Chapter 1

The Anomaly of Commodities

At the dusk of the twentieth century the iconography of consumption bears small resemblance to that which lingered well into the century's midmorning. The sanitorium's white sterilized corridors have given over to the mall's sterile pastel promenades; the blood-soaked handkerchief has been dropped for the goods-filled shopping bag; the emaciated frame of the consumptive has fleshed out into the rotund body of the consumer. Technological advancements in the way of hygienics, diagnosis and finally the discovery of antibiotics in 1940 virtually eradicated consumption as a disease from the Western world. This proved most timely. For by removing the empirical experience of tuberculosis, progressing technology drained the content from the concept of consumption, and precisely at a time when the victorious Allied war machine was anxiously seeking to escape the intolerable boredom of idleness. In the difficult shift from military to civilian mode, the great machine found the newly emptied concept invaluable. The now famous words of American retailing analyst Victor Lebow speak to the seeming opportuneness of the circumstances. Not long after the smoke over Europe had cleared, he wrote:

Our enormously productive economy demands that

> we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in consumption....We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced and discarded at an ever-increasong rate.[3]

Techonology of course, as every advertiser and engineer will tell, has made consumption as "our way of life" materially possible. This is both obvious and not unimportant; nearly all the goods modern Westerners consume, from apples to computers, are technologically secured, produced and delivered. The novelty of modern technology lies in its original method of production and distribution. Informed by reductive materialistic science, it represents the earth as a stockyard of endless commodities. Although finite in matter, when reduced to its base elements the earth admits of infinite recombinations, each one of which waits ready as a potential consumer good. This novel approach to production allows technology to boast the elimination of scarcity. The foregoing history of consumption, however apparently glib, points to a more fundamental relationship between technology and consumerism: a conceptual relationship. Some conception of technologically conditioned consumption must have preceded its actualization. To a people without this basic conceptual understanding, the thought of discarding functional and servicable items must remain incomprehensible. The medieval potter could scarcely have conceived of, much less actually produced, cups, bowls and plates made to survive only a single meal.

A still deeper fundament, however, supports the physical and conceptual relationships. Before

all other possibilities comes ontological possibility. Prior to the economic or technological demand for profound transformations in our way of life, our rituals and our spiritual satisfaction, these must have shown themselves as essentially transformable. The concept and realization of consumption as the essence of human life could only have emerged from a preceding ontology in which things are essentially consumable and humans essentially consumers. To properly appreciate the higher, more conspicuous relations between technology and consumption this basement ontology must be questioned and examined. Only through such thinking will the possibility of other possible relations reveal itself. To question the ontology supporting both technology and consumption is to ask most deeply about the truth and rigidity of their rule.

Or has too much already been presumed? The proclamation of a single retailing analyst does not an ontology make. "Consumption as our way of life" sounds more like heated rhetoric than researched sociology, much less reasoned philosophy. Surely we consume, but this activity we share with all other living, as well as some non-living entities such as fire. Insofar as consuming underlies all animation, "consumption as our way of life" is true, though redundant, and does nothing to specify post-war Western, especially North American, living.

If the mere activity of consuming, being so commonplace, does not serve to radically differentiate what occurs in modern technological culture, then neither will its exaggeration. Bill Mckibben reports the findings of an American sociologist who

> tried to calculate the amount of energy human beings use each day. In hunter-gatherer times it was about 2,500 calories, all of it food. That is the daily intake of a common dolphin. A modern human being uses 31,000 calories a day, most of it in the form of fossil fuel. That is the intake of a pilot whale. And the average American uses six times that--as much as a sperm whale.[2]

Without doubt, we have become prodigal, but as Mckibben's words imply, the difference is simply a matter of degree. Already in the fourteenth century the verb to consume meant to "destroy, to use up, to waste, to exhaust."[3] Consuming, the denizens of high technological culture do just as people and whales have always done, albeit with greater appetite.

Contrary then to the reproaches of social and environmental critics, the mode of modern consuming, only quantitatively distinct from previous modes, does not provide grounds for establishing the radical uniqueness of modern consumption. Supposing for a moment the reality of this uniqueness, if not in the activity--the relation proper--then its grounds must be found in the objects related. Under this supposition, any transformation of ontological significance must have occured in either and/or both of the two terms: in things as consumable and persons as consumers. So while consumption has always described the act of using up and exhausting, perhaps today what in fact gets consumed and who in truth consumes it have undergone essential alterations.

This sounds at first even more dubious than calling the modern act of consuming unique.

Relations tend to be far more mutable than their terms. Technology moreover, as Heilbroner has argued[4], advances straight up a single grand avenue with neither gaps nor potholes; each new product of technology follows logically on those that had gone before it. Where then along this uninterrupted continuum can an essential change in that which is consumed, let alone in the consumer, take place? Although undeniably different, do standardized, mass produced Tupperware containers really differ in essence from the handthrown earthen jug? Only conservative snobbery, one may suspect, would affirm they do.

"To consume", writes Albert Borgmann by way of definition, "is to use up an isolated entity without preparation, resonance, and consequence."[5] Despite the many conflicting interpretations of consumption, from the elegiac to the censurial, this definition looks general enough to garner universal assent. It captures at once both the negative source of unease and reprobation surrounding consumption--that we do blithely use up without preparation, resonance and consequence--and the positive source of ease and exhiliration afforded by consumption--that we are free to use up without the burdens of preparation, resonance and consequence. More importantly, the definition hints at those essential aspects of the terms in the relation of consuming that make modern consumption unique. For although Borgmann's words seem initially to describe only the act of consuming, in fact they reach far deeper into the essential novelty of the modern consumer and her consumeables.

This comes to light with the question: Just what can be used up without preparation, resonance and consequence? In the past very little in fact. Food, even during the abundance of harvest, still required preparation to become a meal, which itself would resonate with the specific tones of that particular season, region and the abilities of its procurers. Owing to the inevitable addition of human labour, whatever was consumed of old had always a consequence, if only in the weariness of the worker. Being consequential, the thing acquired a certain weight, which, as Heidegger has famously tried to show, became its essence, what he called 'reliability'.[6] This in turn introduced a kind of force of resistance into the activity of consuming, with the result that things were more typically used than used up. Durability, then, was also of the essence of a thing, preserving it within the fires of consumption.

Such evocations of a past more solid than the present elicit mistrust today. They are seen as products of wistful, perhaps thick-headed nostalgia, or worse, of willful malcontentment. Even granting that formerly the majority of people had commerce only with resonant, consequential things in need of preparation, there has always been a minority that, owing to servants and slaves, have consumed as Borgmann describes. This fact poses difficulties to an attempt to locate a radical ontological shift that is at the same time historical in nature. The notorious excesses of the aristocracy throughout history suggest that the heart of consumerism may beat in affluence alone. Technology, by extending

the realm of affluence to include the majority, would in that case play an important but merely auxiliary role in the creation of a consumer society. This would discredit all assertions as to the ontological uniqueness of our culture and times. Economics, not ontology, would suffice to explain them. An examination of Borgmann's theory will help resolve this problem. Meanwhile the latter serves to caution against prematurely pronouncing grand ontological claims.

Both in common and in Borgmann's specific parlance, commodities are that which are consumed in the aforementioned manner. But commodities commonly understood have full substantiality, being complete entities in their own right. One trades in commodities, in beef and timber, for example, and presumes to be dealing with real things. For Borgmann, on the contrary, a commodity constitutes only half of the real entity and thus cannot stand on its own. It is somewhat like a shadow in that its apparently distinct existence depends wholly on an altogether different material object. Initially this discrepancy between the two views looks merely semantic, but in fact the discrepancy helps to validate Borgmann's interpretation. His claim is that the peculiarity of modern consumption resides in the capacity of the commodity to become so conspicuous as to conceal the substance and substructures that support it. Like a shadow, the commodity can obscure and hide the real object thanks to which it at all exists. This concealing tendency culminates in the extreme situation attested to by common language, where the commodity no longer

conceals but becomes equivalent with the substance.

'Commodities' for Borgmann are not television sets, automobiles and frozen dinners. These are rather devices designed to fulfill a preconceived function: entertainment, mobility and hunger-satisfaction respectively. Easy entertainment, unrestricted mobility and instant satiety are the true commodities produced by these devices and used up in the activity of consuming. What escapes most consumers and commentators alike, and what Borgmann has observed so perspicuously is the narrowness and rigidity of this activity. Commodities are nothing more than the isolated function or end of a device, a function that has somehow been technically determined as essential. The eccentric who, instead of watching commercial television, fills her set with soil and tulip bulbs does not consume television, for the commodity--passive entertainment--she has eschewed.

Commodities are consumable, that is, used up without preparation, resonance and consequence by virtue of their ontological dependency. If, as commonly understood, commodities were truly substantial entities in their own right, their consumption would imply, as in the case with sticks in fire, a reduction of matter. The physical legacy of consumer culture, spilling out of countless landfill sites, offers contrary evidence. "The United States, with only 4.6% of the world's population, produces about 33% of the world's solid waste...[which translates into] an average of 40 metric tons per person"[7] per year. Consumer culture chokes on rubbish. This affliction does not result

primarily from inefficiences in the act of consuming or from the inexorable law of entropy. Consumer culture evacuates itself of so much waste because it does not use up full, ontologically sufficient entities, but only abstractions and partial aspects of these.

"In sum", writes Borgmann, "what makes something a commodity is not interpretation or projection (a psychological matter) but its structure and construction (an ontological matter)."[8] Although the realm of consumption extends only over commodities, these latter do not fill the former's physical dimensions, nor its garbage dumps. Its dumps overflow, and its incinerators are stoked with devices. Devices are the complete physical entities for which commodities are the isolated, abstracted function. The other half of the device, that which produces and supports the commodity, Borgmann calls the machinery. The confusion regarding what consumer culture actually consumes arises from the fact that the device has as its sole purpose the inconspicuous production of its commodity, its preconceived end. Designed into the very structure and construction of the device is the ability of the machinery to retreat into concealment, allowing the commodity to eclipse it. The machinery, though inscrutable, remains the physically recalcitrant part of the device resistant to consumption. It is this part that makes swollen our dumps, that washes up as technological flotsam on the earth's shores. Meanwhile the abstract, isolated commodities come to command and constitute all of reality. They fill our magazines, our

televised world, often our dreams. They have assumed the foreground of the consumerist "lifestyle" (a word that intimates the unthinkability of existence divorced from fashion) adumbrating the mechanical background, or what Ursula Franklin has called 'the real world of technology.'

Ready examples abound. Not only does the machinery of discrete devices grow smaller, more complicated and less obvious--a line of development highlighted by Borgmann's example of the television set, which began as a great bulk around a tiny screen to end up today an expansive screen and little besides. The propensity for invisibility inherent in the device extends to all corners of consumption. The tedious, dangerous jobs, the toxic effluent, the most disturbing ramifications of rapacious production are often packed from the wealthy consumerist countries to the poor, though eagerly aspiring non-consumerist ones. None of the injustice, sweat and deprivation needed to keep the cornucopia of fresh commodities brimming is displayed in the supermarket aisles. There only ease, convenience and consumer whimsy play; the strained backs, the exhausted land, the direness born of destitution never come to view. If Borgmann appears at times to use 'commodity' and 'device' as synonyms, a fruitful inquiry into modern consumption must strictly maintian his original distinction. Were it the case that modern consumers in fact consumed, used up and replaced devices, i.e., both machinery and commodity, consumption as a way of life might well be less troublesome. As it is, however, modern consumers inhabit only

the foreground, enjoying commodities while ignoring, discarding and exploiting the machinery.

The great divide incorporated by the device between commodity and machinery is its essential feature. It makes modern consumption possible by radically altering at least one term in the relational activity of consuming. Unlike people of non-consumerist cultures, modern consumers do not use up real, complete entities; they consume instead selected abstractions from complete entities. Modern consumers deal with less than total being. Every portrayal and celebration of the market as a fantasyland of unlimited possibilities reiterates this fact.

Nevertheless humans remain, to the chagrin of some futurists, stubbornly physical beings. The consumption of insubstantial commodities would seem bound to fail to satisfy the real needs of consumers. Certain evidence bears out this objection. Advertisers and marketers earn their living off the knowledge that consuming frequently titilates more than it satisfies or satiates. But obviously modern consumption does provide for people's physical being, else the majority of consumers would look as waifish as supermodels instead of paunched and corpulent. The great divide between commodity and machinery does not cut neatly down the psychological and physical realms. Indeed the hidden conatus of modern consumption strives to negate the distinction between these. This conatus eventually arrives at virtual reality, "and the extreme case is the experience that is induced by direct manipulation of the brain. It is extreme

because here the commodity has reached its ultimate attenuation; it is no longer even a physical aspect of a thing or event, however thin and partial."[9] If modern consumption happens to leave the consumer obese and vulnerable to heart disease, this merely reflects the relative technological unsophistication of current devices. They do not yet operate as pure commodities, i.e., completely without consequences. Likewise, the human body will stay at a primitive level with respect to consumption so long as it fails to subsist on commodities alone.

Although the disdain for the natural, unadorned human body shown by consumer culture may call to mind Zarathrusta's disgusted rebukes against the "Despisers of the body", Borgmann offers a more moderate and convincing interpretation than can Nietzsche. The present landscape of consumption did not result from dark tectonic forces pushing blindly toward power. Rather it began its formation in the full light of day with the conscious thoughts of those who fathered the Enlightenment. As an intellectual movement, the Enlightement concerned itself with human liberation of all kinds. Finding that the beautiful edifice of culture and learning stood on the foundation of leisure and prosperity, its early champions, notably Bacon and Descartes, rightly regarded excessive physical toil and hard penury great hinderances to the flowering of human excellence. Bodily ills and appetites occupied humans at the expense of their more essential being, their rational being. The Enlightenment promised to free humanity for and guide it to its most fitting ends. The mechanical arts, known now as technology,

were to accomplish whatever practical feats this promise required.

Before it could emancipate humanity, technology had to decide what in fact enslaved it. Disease and decrepitude immediately suggest themselves. But even of the healthy, the world of pre-Enlightenment things could demand incessant, seemingly superfluous care, as Borgmann has shown with his example of the hearth. The utility provided by the hearth in terms of warmth seemed out of all proportion to the labour, skill, danger and constrictive social relations it exacted. All these demands gave the hearth a certain mass, the gravity of which pulled together the world around it. One could not procure warmth without, so it seemed extraneously, engaging that world; not without growing weary with the axe, not without learning to coax the shy flame to exuberance, not without the constant fear of conflagration and finally not without having to endure the company and conversation of those gathered around its heat. The inherent functionalism of technology, together with its promise of freedom enabled it to dismiss all such weight as needless extra baggage. Born of the Enlightenment, technology sought literally to lighten the world of things under which humanity stooped. Only by lifting the wearisome burdens from the people's back could technology allow them to walk tall and upright as befitted their wondrous reason.

Because Borgmann believes that bodily engagement with things and the practices that focus around them give depth and meaning to our lives, his critique of technology keeps trained on the violence

done to things by technological devices. The promise itself, in the name of which technology enacts this violence, Borgmann regards as legitimate and proper to fulfill. But technology falls short of fulfillment due to its intrinsic instrumentalism and the limited techniques it must employ. Finding the world fraught with inefficient, burdensome and seemingly superfluous relations, the emancipatory power of technology was aimed at the dissipation of world. The limitations of time and space, the contigencies of health and ability dealt out by nature, the often confining, sometimes humiliating dependency on others, all these technology as the practical embodiment of the human nisus towards freedom worked to overcome. It would do so by eliminating all the unnecessary and restrictive bodily and social relations demanded of by things. Finally, in lieu of those intractable physical and psychological relations it could not eliminate without endangering or deadening humans, technology offered commodities: isolated, partial entities that functioned to fill the need without preparation, resonance and consequence. Commodities could address with abundance the physical and psychological needs of humans by enervating their much broader bodily, social and spiritual needs. Since basic physical and psychological needs appear to be humanity's lowest common denominator, by elevating them above all other relations, technology seemed to instantiate the Enlightenment's egalitarian and democratic ideals. A good commodity is one that every person can consume, no matter how much damage she has suffered from the slings and arrows of fortune.

The device paradigm, then, is technlogy's one and only response to the promise made on its behalf by the Enlightenment. Not only was it supposed to free humanity from drudgery, it was also to enrich it with the prosperity and wealth, which thinkers since Aristotle have recognized as prerequisites for leisure, learning, virtue; in a word, excellence. But technology's response remains deeply problematic because, having dissipated the world of things, having unmoored the fulfillment of physical and psychological needs from the exertions and skills of bodily and social engagement it left itself no recourse to distinguish significant from frivolous pursuits. Having made light of the world as a whole, technology encounters nothing ponderous that might slow it down and give it pause. Starship earth becomes a planet without gravity. Thus any kind of limitation, even the natural process of aging, becomes an imposition on human freedom and an obstacle to human prospering. The development of comfort and convenience can be graphed like a isotoperic function. At first, with the introduction of technology, significant liberating advances occur. But as the line approaches the axis, as technology matures and proliferates, the actual change and significance grow increasingly negligible. Driving an automobile--an activity that of all others symbolizes most potently technology's emancipatory power--now seems an almost Herculean labour without cruise-control, power brakes and steering, automatic transmission, air-conditioning and a multi-speaker stereo. Yet even these new-found necessities can do nothing to free the commuter from the diurnal

incarceration of gridlock. Since the chore of letter writing, for those pitiable few still shackled to such antiquities, is so insufferably taxing, the technological wing of Canada Post has engineered new self-adhesive stamps, lest someone expire in the final effort of lifting stamp to tongue. As for those financially endowed--the full citizens of technocratic democracy--they are urged not simply to buy the fastest, sleekest most powerful computer, but also exhorted to collect one in each of six available colours.

Borgmann employs the term 'availability' with special import to describe both the process whereby a thing mutates into a commodity as well as the essence of the latter. Having determined and isolated the sole function or end of a thing, i.e., its presumed commodity, technology develops and continually redevelops the machinery that will render this commodity most available. A commodity is available when it can be consumed easily, instanteously, safely and ubiquitously. The device has as its single telos the available production of its commodity. Remarkable here again are the ontological peculiarities. For while a commodity exists only by virtue of its availability, that which makes it available remains just the opposite. The central heating system, Borgmann's counter-example to the hearth, clearly manifests these peculiarities. Technology reduces the bodily and socially engaging world of the hearth to the single-faceted commodity of warmth and creates the device capable of rendering this warmth available. The central heating system supplies warmth

ubiquitously through the house, easily and instanteously at the push of a button without demanding any skill or danger of the consumer. However, the commodity's availability relies on the unavailability of the machinery. The actual machinery of the central heating system, far from ubiquitous, is not even visible but closeted somewhere in the cellar; with its gas or oil connections, and electrical components it is not at all safe except in expert hands. Still less is it instantaneous, being the end product of years of accumalated research and development on the part of engineers and may hours of wage labour on the part of the consumer. Finally, there is nothing easy about it, as its mere possibility is conditioned on the global mining, engineering and transportation infrastructures. The essence of the commodity is the contrary to that of the machinery, and the device which ontologically binds the two must be an entity at war with itself.

"Commodities and their consumption constitute the professed goal of the technological enterprise."[10] For Borgmann this means "if we are committed to the further sophistication and expansion of the technological machinery of the industrially advanced countries, it can only be for the sake of more numerous, varied, and refined consumption goods, to be enjoyed in leisure."[11] A technological society is necessarily a consumerist one, tending toward an increasing proliferation of frivolties. The combination of the promise of liberty and prosperity inherited by technology together with its narrow capacity to respond to this results in

its deterministic influence. From the instrumentalist vantage of technology, liberty can only mean freedom from the worldly impositions of bodily and social engagement. Prosperity tenuously retains its traditional connection with leisure, but this latter, when technically defined, gets reduced to the consumption of commodites, since these alone do not impose. Technology, in answering its promise, establishes the device paradigm that first alleviates, then finally eliminates the imposing world of things. The crucial ontological features of the device, viz., the conspicuous availability of the commodity and the concealed reticence of the machinery, make it largely incomprehensible, thus in an important sense meaningless. It can generate commodities availably only by presenting them stripped of the limitations of context, which, as basic semantics teach, underlies all meaning.

Why economics and the spread of affluence fail to explain the emergence of consumer culture can now be answered. A commodity is solely by virtue of its availability. In the past, natural limits confined the availability of things. When nature itself, however, becomes a warehouse of resources and merely the sum of manipulable matter that admits of infinite combinations, availability attains universality. Technology, which reveals nature in this manner, renders everything consumeable. The consumer culture does not follow from affluence. Rather affluence and consumerism follow from the modern state of universal availability.

Consumption as a new way of life, as the

unprecedented pulse of society rests in the ontology of the device. Humans always and everywhere consume, but only those of a technological society consume commodities: partial entities that structurally conceal their substance and significance. Since they are available, their consumption requires no preparation, nor strikes any resonance; and lacking full ontological status, they are consumed and disposed of without immediately apparent consequence. As Borgmann makes clear, the device paradigm extends far beyond this odd new kind of artifact to cover all aspects of our technological society. Thus it happens that celebrities, traditions, foreign cultures and even religious experiences become consumeable. Wherever a single facet of a complex human-world relation gets technically defined an end--whether that be entertainment, adventure, or personal development--and the means to this end get subjected to purely technical considerations of efficiency and availability, there a device is born, a commodity created. Modern consumption owes its uniqueness to the ontological anomaly of the device and its commodity. Not yet explored is whether the other term of the relation of consuming, namely persons, has not also undergone ontological mutations. Do the oft heard cries from humanists lamenting the degeneration of citizen into consumer have any ontological basis? Borgmann claims the very nature of commodities necessitates their inconsequential consumption. If, for example, Heidegger was right to locate the essence of human existence in care, what then do humans become on a planet filled with 'carefree', 'foolproof' and

'no-maintanence' commodities? These questions will occupy subsequent pages.

For now it suffices to note the subtle persistence of language. Consumption may no longer mean an infectious disease that wastes the body and quarantines the individual. Yet despite its etymological evolution, modern 'consumption' still as much implies a diminishment of bodily reality and a reduction of social ties. The only change, it seems, is in the popular consciousness, that now believes consumption cannot kill us but only makes us stronger.

Chapter 2

The Story of Technology

As David Strong observes, Borgmann's theory of the device makes "clear what it is about technology that is attractive to us."[1] Although the theory includes an element of technological determinism, it attains a credibility difficult to ascribe to harder determinstic accounts that paint technology as the bully of history and culture. Borgmann succeeds in showing how technology, by means of the device, stamps a definite, ineluctable pattern on society, but also why we do not chafe beneath these constrictions. If deterministic, technology, due to its promissory nature, is not felt to be coercive. We are complicit in promoting and prolonging its rule; we enjoy the disburdenment it offers, often becoming happily enthralled with the glamour, wonder and seeming magic that surround it.

Our complicity involves us, of course, in the manufacture and maintanence of the technological order, but it betrays itself most patently in the realm of consumption. One flagrant example is the very act of buying. Notwithstanding the common knowledge that marketing companies record and track the purchases made with debit and credit cards, and notwithstanding the many hues and cries raised about the dwindling sphere of personal privacy, people voluntarily

surrender their consumer information to vast data-bases at a rate that has surprised even the creators of the debit and credit systems. The fears of authoritarian control, increased surveillance and loss of privacy rights vanish at the the check-out counter when the option between anynomous cash and convenient card is given. The subsequently direct-marketed junkmail and inoppurtune calls from telephone solicitors seem a tolerable price to pay for the freedom of not having to carry a pocketbook heavy with bills and coins. Since technology is the practical embodiment of the promise of liberty and prosperity, the extent of our freedom would seem to correspond to the fullness of our technological embrace. Thus to oppose technology must appear outright perverse, an election for a life nasty, brutish and short. Technology presents any alternative as way of life unfit for human dignity and thereby prevails by default. What human, after all, does not wish to live humanly?

Even within the realm of consumption, however, the depth of individual complicity begins to shoal in the light of certain technological developments. These suggest an unrecognized force altogether foreign to technology's promissory impetus may operate in its growth. Again the automobile, a paradigmatic device, provides a telling instance of one such development. For many in North America the choice of whether to own and use a car remains for the most part hypothetical. The real decision has been made for them by policies and infrastructures created to suit the car-driver. Some of these are the direct results of underhanded dealings perpetrated by those

corporate powers greatly interested in the proliferation of automobiles. Still, it is more plausible to attribute General Motors' and Philips Petroleum's surreptious and intentional dismantlement of public transit systems earlier this century in one hundred American cities to human greed than to some autonomous will to power striving in technology.[2] On the other hand, what can one make of the astonishing multiplication of large, grossly inefficient vans, trucks and 'sport utility vehicles'? In the United States, sales of these brutes already surpass those of moderate, fuel-efficient cars,[3] and at a time when the many ills of fossil fuel consumption and the finitude of accessible oil resources have become incontestable public knowledge.

One could, probably from some thread of truth, spin out an elaborate conspiracy theory that included the oil and automotive industries, as well as the imperialistic branches of the US government to explain this brazen disregard for current realities. More helpful, if less entertaining, is to examine the situation with an eye to discovering the true extent of human complicity and technological autonomy. Borgmann maintains that technology has an inherent stability, that "in the paradigmatic sense [it] has the conceptual resources to deal with its crises, and thereby obtains the material resources as a matter of course."[4] Many others, although with far greater enthusiasm, echo the same: whatever ills technology may happen to afflict it supposedly will in due time cure. Such techno-optimists esteem technology, like the free-market, as a self-regulating system endowed with a rationality that permits only uninterrupted

beneficial progress. The inexplicable multiplication of 'muscle-vehicles', not to mention the nuclear coquetry of the United States, Russia and China, who continue to flirt with cold war, shakes confidence in technology's supposed stability. Why are huge all-terrain vehicles the fastest selling on the market? Do 16-miles-per-gallon automobiles liberate humanity that much more effectively than 40 or 60-miles-per-gallon models? Or does their novelty explain their appeal to consumers? Although the purchase of every sport utility vehicle remains the outcome of an individual consumer's decision, the entire phenomenon of manufacturing excessively powerful vehicles for rugged outdoor terrian on a planet where every day oil resources decline, air pollution increases and actual rugged, unpaved land disappears beneath more ashpalt seems beyond the scope of anyone's comprehension, much less control.

Alone the device paradigm does not suffice to elucidate this umbrageous absurdity. Neither does T.P. Hughes' concept of technological momentum.[5] The capital, both physical and financial, invested in the production of oil and automobiles can account for resistance to attempts to reduce the number of vehicles or to utilize alternative sources of fuel. It cannot, however, account for the public appeal for intentionally and needlessly destructive trucks. Just because here the consumer seems fully complicit, seems in fact to drive the entire situation, the question must be asked: just what drives the consumer?

Borgmann has already discounted the advertisers and professed technocrats. Consumers may sometimes surrender themselves to the seductions of these

technological eulogists, but they can hardly claim to be their helpless victims. The reason for this is simple: the eulogists themselves are enchanted by the same technological spell they presume to conjure over others. In a thoroughly technological society, i.e., a consumer culture, no distinction exists between advertiser and consumer. Consumers happily buy and display advertisements and advertisers blithely consume. Insofar as each act of commodity consumption is an affirmation of the belief in the promise of technology, every consumer proclaims the unconditional goodness and value of this promise. Advertisers simply do the same for pay.

But could the promise of technology itself, rather than the prime mover of the device, be a moment in some larger historical movement? The hope of emancipation through the domination of nature, through disburdenment, through the availability of inconsequential commodities is not part of an eternal human essence. This hope has not inspired all peoples at all times and places. If perhaps the bare impulse towards freedom and happiness constitutes a trans-historical essential feature of human being, the historical responses to this show great variety. Buddhism, Hinduism and stoicism all locate freedom in the abandonment of desires, and in a mastery internally directed at the self rather then externally at the world. The Christian gospels state that truth alone sets one free. The ancient Greeks, as attested by their tragedies, sought their freedom at the incomprehensible nexus where gods, Moirai and their own personal responsibility met. They bought their happiness with discipline of body, mind and character,

gods be willing and well-disposed, of course. Fate and the unpredictable whims of the divinities overshadowed, though not necessarily ominously, all human enterprise. A certain inscrutable order did rule throughout the cosmos, but was considered inaccessible at times even to the gods, far less to humans. Entreaties, sacrifices and prayers alone could bring a measure of security to humans incapable of fathoming the cosmic order.

Hegel's interpretation of history charts the progression of human ascendency by which the unconscious spirit becomes conscious by reintegrating and reclaiming all the alienated aspects of itself which it has projected outwards. Corresponding to, and in Marx actually propulsing, this spiritual ascent of increasing self-consciousness is the material development of human culture. As more phenomena fall under human control and determination, the dependency on external entities, and even the distinction between them and the spirit weakens as a matter of course. With each increase in humanity's power and knowledge, its security, freedom and happiness appear ever more convincingly to be functions of the same. As humans assume lordship over the earth, fate dissipates, gods die, limitations dissolve and finally the earth itself--the insurmountable distinction between subject and object--disappears.

For Hegel, pure consciousness eventually achieves absolute knowledge, becoming sufficient unto itself. The popular view of progress that finds freedom and self-fulfillment in the incessant march to the total privatization and subjectification of experience, in the dissolution of the foreign concreteness of

outer corporeal reality, in the rush towards full transparency of consciousness through genetic and chemical manipulation, this view can be seen as a technologically bastardized version of Hegelianism. The bastardization goes more commonly by its other name: consumerism. Neala Schleuning remarks that

> Hegel's framework essentially endorses the limited but perfect consumer personality-- creative, desiring, self-indulgent, and basically indifferent to others because it is still focused on the subjective self. Hegel's self is also an individual in process, never quite complete, always moving to new levels of self-actualization, growing and changing, an approach especially sympathetic to the consumer economy's imperative to continue consuming.[6]

A baffling complexity of apparent causes and effects, corollaries and auxiliaries offers itself as explanation to the undeniable historical trend, at least in the West, towards abstract, decorporealized, subjective being. Lines may be traced through any number of historical developments. In ecomonics, to take but one example, the line runs from the simple bartering of material goods through the adoption of an abstract currency in the form of coinage, through the capitalistic shift from the value of goods as based on use to that as based on market exchange, through the creation of completely immaterial wealth accumulated in stocks and bonds and finally ends in the present computer-facilitated activity of currency speculation, which daily shuffles three trillion digital dollars back and forth in 'cyberspace'. The opening of this 'fifth dimension', cyberspace, most loudly heralds a new epoch of abstraction. William Mitchell prophesies that

cyberspace will "overlay and eventually succeed the agricultural and industrial landscapes that humankind has inhabited for so long."[7] And unmistakable echoes of a grossly distorted Hegelianism can be heard in the heady prognoses of cognitive scientists and philosophers eager to enlarge the domain of consciousness to circuits and microchips. Computer software designer Ray Kurzweil asks in all earnestness "What, after all is the difference between a human who has upgraded her body and brain using new nanotechnology, and computational technologies, and a robot who has gained an intelligence and sensuality surpassing her human creators?"[8]

Modern consumption, of course, follows the trend in its exclusive commerce with partial, contextless entities called commodities. However, it does not stop there. Depending upon the various theorists, consuming in a high consumerist culture is said to be primarily self-expression, communication, pyschological exploration and identity-seeking. Here consumption's tie to real material things has fully unravelled. Commodities themselves, already ontologically unstable entities, become mere signs, signifiers or empty repositories for cultural and personal meanings. As such they no longer fulfill even a physical need but meld and vanish completely into the desires and self-realizations of the subject.

In step with this march to material abstraction and absolute subjectivity is the seemingly inexhaustible growth of the human population. They advance together partly because technology and human population also do. Technological developments, such as the early agricultural revolution and its twentieth

century 'green' counterpart, push back physical limits constraining populations. These increased populations thereby attain larger resources of labour and knowledge which generally make for more robust forces of production. At a local level within nations, technological advancement and population growth move in opposite directions, as the low birth rates of industrialized countries demonstrate. At a global level, on the contrary, they enter into a cycle of stimulation, with each requiring the other; greater productive forces need larger pools of labour and consumers on which to draw; while a larger number of labourers and consumers need greater productive forces to employ and supply them. Beyond this material connection, a psychological one also binds the expansions of population and subjectivity. As numbers of people swell and their material culture spreads, the numbers of natural creatures and wild places diminish. Increasingly humanity confronts only itself and its own creations, the combination of which seems ever more plausibly to compose all of reality. The opportunities for encountering something alien and Other which may make us question the universality of human subjectivity and power are trampled by the growing crowds of people. Given this, it should come as little surprise that 'consumption as a way of life', virtual reality and genetic engineering all occur within the half century that has seen the human population explode from two to six billion.

But for all their explicative helpfulness, demographics cannot address the basic ontological questions accompanying the strange march to absolute subjectivity. Rising threshholds of population and

technological sophistication may cooperate to encourage each other and achieve new levels of abstraction, but they cannot alone account for themselves. True, only a huge global population and its collective technology could have produced a computer capable of opening a virtual space. Yet before this, space must have revealed itself as something that can be virtual, that is, placeless. Likewise, before the agricultural revolution, the earth had to show itself beneath the trees and meadows as something cultivatable. Finally, the possibility that has allowed humanity to become titanic, to move from a relatively minor position among other beings to one of total predominance and preponderance must also have its ontological roots. Before man could become lord, he had to be and understand himself as a being that can rule. Neither people, however great their number, nor their technology can accomplish or bring into being that which is not and cannot be.

Heidegger took true philosophy to be the mindful observance of the slow unfurl of the multifarious possibilities of Being. He put to himself the task of thinking through the history of Being. This task turned out to be a kind of vigil over what Heidegger called the ontological difference. The difference, to which many philosophers have been asleep, lies between beings--or that which is--and Being--that through which beings are. The latter, having none of the traditional ontological properties, does not in any conventional sense exist. It is rather the possibility of existence. It is the overarching and supporting context of meaning within which everything is understood as something, even if only as something

incomprehensible. For an entity to appear incomprehensible, it must be revealed in terms of and in relation to other entities that admit of comprehension. This "in terms of and in relation to" is Being.

An analogy to language may help to clarify Heidegger's distinctive understanding of Being. If discrete words correspond neatly to discrete entities, Being might then seem analogous to the totality of words, along with the rules and structures of grammar, syntax etc. Being seems to correspond with language as such. But when understood in this manner, the ontolgical difference threatens to collapse, for Heidegger repeatedly argues that Being is not the mere sum of beings and their relations. It is more true to think of Being as analogous to that which precedes and permits all language, namely, the potential to communicate. A history of Being, accordingly attempts to understand the actualizations with regard to the potential. It studies how the evolution of language responds to communicability.

Heidegger's project, in spite it being, in Borgmann's words, "beset with external problems"[9] commands attention if only at first because of its bravado. His claim that the technological world order, and one can add consumerism as its latest moment, is the final stage of a historical negation of Being that has little to do with humans, their knowledge and actions, sounds grossly hyperbolic, if not outright absurd. On the other hand, the competing absurdities of modern life--its social estrangement, its meaninglessness, its obsessive affinity for sport utility vehicles--moderate the apparent hyperbole

of Heidegger's thought. This backdrop of absurdity, futhermore, mitigates the frustration sometimes felt by the reader of Heidegger, who obdurately declines from explaining to insist rather on 'thinking' (Denken). The revelations of Being, the historical Gestalten that it takes remain, according to Heidegger, purposeless and utterly beyond the conception of rational faculties. They simply frustrate all attempts at explication. We fail to truly think Being and the ontological difference as soon as we seek the conditions of their possibility. Because Being does not exist in the manner of phenomena accessible to reason, applying the categories of reason to it can only falsify it. Much criticism of Heidegger, especially concerning his views on technology, stems from this surrender (some would prefer to call it an irresponsible abdication) of the capacity to explain and know. It is feared to lead to mysticism, quietism and worst of all, Nazism. Such fears have some legitimacy. Nonetheless on the most basic level Heidegger's 'Denken' comes out unscathed. For it has swathed itself in the impenetrable wonder that asks with neither expectation nor desire of explanation the ultimate question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Or more simply: Warum gibt es Sein?

Of course, Heidegger's thought on technology is not inassailable. Borgmann locates shortcomings in Heidegger's "lack of appreciation of the benefits of technology, and the impotence of his responses."[10] Micheal Zimmerman concludes that "if we may benefit from Heidegger's insight that modern technology is characterized by a one-dimensional way of disclosing entities, we must also be willing to criticize his

presuppositions about the extent to which humans are incapable of resisting and developing alternatives to that disclosure."[11] To an inquiry concerned with the technologically deterministic features of a consumer society, such caveats recommend a more circumspect approach than Heidegger's. It must overlook neither explicative, empirical, nor moral considerations in favour of exclusive ontological questioning. These caveats also advise that ontological possiblity not be thought as absoulutely independent of material and social change. The three most likely interact in a complicated manner to expose new constellations of possibilities. Needed is a strange kind of historical materialism informed by ontology. People's complicity with, just as much as their occassional resistance to the spreading reign of technology introduces a complexity that defies simplistic unilateral historical determinism. Yet here Heidegger's apparent inconsistencies save him to some extent. He holds the paradoxical belief that humans, even while compelled by Being to construct the technological order, are nevertheless responsible and answerable for their construction. "It now appears", Borgmann admits, "as though...our common views of freedom and determinism are unequal to the explication of Heidegger's thought."[12] Indeed, Heidegger refuses to seperate freedom from the destiny of Being. Their union must appear implausible if we insist upon the incommensurability of the two. The final chapter will try to reconcile freedom and destiny.

As with most thinkers, no authoritative defense nor critique can settle matters one way or the other.

Heidegger's thought deserves the attention of an inquiry into consumerism because it proposes to situate the device--a seeming ontological anomaly--within a larger ontological history. Since meaning relies on context, and human understanding operates within narrative structures, the device needs this historical contextualization before it can be deeply understood. It will continue to baffle and disarm us so long as we take it simply as a peculiar genus of entity untouched by the process of historical evolution. Indeed, a good part of its bewitchment it has by virtue of its ability to conceal its history. Therefore to think it historically is to disenchant it.

Moreover, the latent, though persistent fears of technology's autonomy, in spite of its ascribed emancipatory essence, and the widespread, though seldomly explicitly aknowledged dissatisfaction with materialism[13] suggest that perhaps a force beyond human ken and control does fire the whole techno-consumerist works. To be sure, Heidegger's thought does not readily supply satisfactory answers, but this it never presumed or attempted. It thinks in order to make things truly questionable, that is, worthy of questioning (fragwuerdig). To truly affirm or truly contest it is equally to think along with it. We engage it here not because consumer culture and its technological foundations need answers, which come in volumes. Rather, we engage it because our current 'way of life' needs most of all to be questioned, and wants most of all meaning.

Much of Heidegger's interpretation of history parallels Hegel's. That Western thought steadily

advances towards absolute self-certainty; that reason has as its inherent destiny the ascension to total authority; that all-knowing consciousness ultimately dissolves the hard distinction between subject and object, all this Heidegger asserts as confidently as Hegel. But whereas Hegel believed philosophy and history had ended with him, Heidegger thinks Hegel marks only the beginning of the end. Philosophy, history, and absolute knowing had to wait another century after Hegel for their completion. They finally achieve this not in a benighted study at Jena, but rather in florescent labratories busy with cyberneticists.

So while both philosophers saw that the road of reason historically leads to absolute knowledge, Hegel celebrates this as the glorious apotheosis of Spirit and Heidegger laments it as the dangerous absence of truth. There is, of course, more at work here than merely the contrary dispositions of a meliorist and a detiorist, more than the opposing perspectives of a champion of the Enlightenment and a sympathiser of the Renaissance. Neither is it simply a matter of Heidegger exploiting a privileged temporal position, rewriting Hegel from a subsequent advantage. Any denizen of the twentieth century the least bit susceptible to the cruel rationality of two World Wars, the astounding moods of anxiety, absurdity and homelessness, the woeful destruction of the earth, and the unconscionable injustices of the new global economy must cast doubt on Hegel's pronouncements concerning the perfection of the Spirit. Heidegger's interpretation of history is appealing because it shows how Hegel can be correct even whilst contributing

to the disappearance of truth.

Although Heidegger himself does not use the language, his history of Western philosophy, which he equated with metaphysics, can be metaphorically summarized thus: starting from an acorn of anthropocentrism it grew to an indomitable oak of 'anthropo-solipsism' (or in words closer to Heidegger's: an initial forgetfulness of Being degenerated into total amnesia). Hegel marks only the beginning of the end of metaphysics because, although he shows all phenomena to be products of a developing consciousness, the production itself of these remains unconscious. The sequence of phenomena falls out naturally from the inner structures of consciousness, and is not willed directly by it. Thus the phenomena retain a certain relative independence from consciousness. The will of consciousness is still the will to knowledge, to discovery and all that both imply.

With Nietzsche, however, metaphysics comes to completion. His teaching of the will to power inaugurates the final phase of anthropocentrism. Because willing power means asserting acquired power and at the same time claiming unacquired power, the will enters into perpetual motion to secure and enlarge the power it possesses. To do this it requires the conditions that guarantee the preservation and the possible expansion of its power. The will attains its requisite conditions in the act of valuation, calling 'good', 'truthful', 'real' those conditions that contribute to its power; calling 'bad', 'false' and 'illusionary' those that do not. All phenomena then get determined by and with sole reference to

the will; "All valuing is a subjectification."[14] The will as absolute subject willfully determines every object in accordance with its own point of view. It bestows reality upon, i.e., it allows to be, only those objects that coincide with this selective viewpoint. As the absolute arbiter of being, the will surrounds itself with only the conditions for its possibility and thus nails shut the casket of solipsism.

At the end of metaphysics, the will values and revalues, makes and remakes the world so as to be able to continually make and remake itself. This endless cycle betrays the true essence of the will to power: ultimately it is the sheer will to will, a pointless, endless striving. This self-enclosed, one could say cybernectic Being, attempts to project meaning outwards from its own essential meaninglessness onto other beings. The project, however, must necessarily fail, for nihil ex nihilo. "The appearance of the metaphysical configuration of humanity as the source of meaning [Sinngebung] is the last consequence of the positioning of human being as the authoritative subject."[15] And so the night of nihilism descends.

Heidegger, though for reasons other than Nietzsche's, affirms his assertion that "nihilism is the 'inner logic' of Western history."[16] It stands as the the destiny of metaphysics, a destiny first activated by Plato and his contemporaries. To see this, an understanding of Heidegger's theory of truth is necessary. Heidegger thought truth an ontological event, never just a relation of some sort of correspondence or other. The event of truth occurs within a context of meaning, when a being reveals

itself as something significant, receiving its significance according to how it relates to other entities. Each phenomenon is true insofar as it supports and is supported by by the truth of all other phenomena. The former analogy of Being and language serves here again. Any single word attains truth only in the context of a meaningful sentence. The sentence, in turn, attains truth only if it allows each word to contribute meaningfully to the significance of the entirety. Truth, then, has to do with meaning. But meaning has as much to do with Being. If truth, as in the analogy, is meaningful communication, then it is also the actual occurrence or event of communicability, that is, of Being. In other words, truth is the active realization of which Being is the underlying possibility. When an entity is revealed meaninfully through its relations to other entities truth occurs. It occurs in and out of Being, which, to reiterate, is not the sum of all entities and relations, but is more basically relating itself and thus is the possibility of meaning. Being has a history becasue meaning remains always circumstantially determined; as circumstances change so too does that which appears meaningful within them. Just as philology reveals a history of human communication embodied in languages, ontology reveals a history of Being. It studies Being's many different actual occurrences embodied in the revelation of entities.

Humans play a privileged and crucial role in the coming to be of entities, are in fact needed by Being insofar as they are the sole beings capable of truth, of meaning, of significance. The latter

two terms, prevelant in his earlier Being and Time, Heidegger later abandons in favour of words less traditional, like thinking (Denken), speaking (Sagen), building (Bauen), dwelling (Wohnen) and poetizing (a brutal translation of Dichten). Despite the change in terminology, the import of Heidegger's thought remains unaltered. In Being and Time meaning and significance are the way through which humans necessarily participate in the disclosure of entities, the revelation of Being. Connecting all phenomena in a coherent context, they provide a world for entities wherein these may appear at all as something. For a thing to be (say a hammer) a particular framework must exist (in this case a workshop) that allows the thing to appear as such. Interpretation, which for the early Heidegger is essential for the disclosure of entities, entails the attribution of meaning to singular beings based on and derived from the concentric spheres of context and ultimately from the totality of significance. Language plays an obvious role in interpretation and meaning; it opens a realm where meaning can be articulated, shared and validated. It is therefore the source of meaning and significance. Being, which means also truth, springs from language, since through it Being happens. The analogy now approaches synonomy, insofar as communicability occurs only through actual communication. A possibility is recognized and understood first and foremost through its realizations.

"Language is the house of Being"[17], writes Heidegger in his famous letter written to correct misunderstandings of his earlier thought. The most dangerous of these, one readily apparent from the

foregoing summary, confuses and aggrandizes the scope of human participation in the event of Being and truth. Although Heidegger never reduced meaning to a mere function of human understanding, by emphasizing the primacy of interpretation in ontological disclosure he inadvertently threatened to make humans the absolute authors and readers of everything. However, "humans are not the lords of beings. Humans are the protectors of Being."[18] Heidegger's later language reflects his strengthened conviction that Being occurs over and above all human will and intention. Thinking, building, creating poetry and art are the ways by which humans attend to what is. Humans properly attend to things by tending them, that is, by preserving them in their being: "The essential feature of dwelling is this preservation....Dwelling, moreover, is the essential feature of Being", because through dwelling, a site is opened, a stage is set for the meaningful entrance of beings. By dwelling, thinking, poeticizing, which "as a letting dwell is a kind of building"[19], humans let a world unfold in which all entities have their place. Formerly called context, now more familiarly called 'home', this world gives meaning to things by situating them and allowing them thereby to reflect their connections to all else.

Meaning, in the evolution of Heidegger's thought, ceases to have its roots in interpretation, which is too easily mistaken for a wholly human affair. Instead meaning (Bedeutung) arises from indication (Deutung). Especially through art and poetry humans point out (deuten) things, which then reveal themselves by indicating their relations to each other and by extension to the world. Thus the world is not

constructed by humans as the word 'interpretation' might suggest, but rather it happens when humans, tending to things, allow them to reveal themselves in accordance with Being. The underlying passive connotations of the phenomenologist's mantra, that one get "to the things themselves" by "letting them be", becomes explicit in Heidegger's later notion of releasement (Gelassenheit) to the true presence of Being.

Heidegger never tired of reiterating the autonomy of Being and humanity's subservient position to it, because the underestimation of both, committed first by the Greeks, has led to the current epoch of technological nihilism. As truth is the event of Being revealed through entities, how this revealing takes place bears directly on truth. Plato thought this revealing occured through 'poiesis', a "bringing-forth [that] comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment."[20] Consequently, the actualization of Being becomes a production in the several senses of the world. As a production that brings-forth out of concealment, revealing retains its original meaning as a self-occuring event. Here production is like a play, a presentation that brings beings into presence. But this sense gets easily obscured by the other, more common one, that intends production as the making of something real. Here the emphasis moves from the occasion of Being to the actual occasioning of something. The event of Being is eclipsed by its product, as when words, especially jargon, overwhelm and replace intelligible meaning. Zimmerman explains how "Plato initiated productionist metaphysics by

turning being into 'beingness', presencing into something permanently present."[21] So begins the Western path towards total reification, which culminates paradoxically in nihilism, the epoch of no-thing.

Although they initiated this path, the Greeks did not venture far down it. They were still too awed by the sheer enormity of Being to ascribe to themselves the occurence of such momentousness. Succeeding epochs, however, became increasingly preoccupied with the idea of truth as producing, along with the anthropocentric associations inherent in the concept of production. With the Romans, 'bringing-forth' becomes strict causality, where causes make effects. This again shifts primacy from the 'bringing' to the brought, which already present remains secure in its being, independent and real. The shift of focus from the mysterious event of presencing to the solid permanence of the present thing allows causality, as a productive revealing, to attain an unprecedented lawfulness. With lawfulness arrives predictability, determinability and certainty. When revealing becomes causal, nothing appears without having a prior cause to produce it. From this two epochal consequences follow. First, everything that is can now be known, and secondly everything at least theoretically admits of manipulation and control. If truth is the event of revealing, and if this event itself is the production of something, then to glean the truth is to know how the product is produced. This implies a further final step: to be is to be effected. Truth, the event of revelation, therefore is the effecting. To know the whole truth of something

is to actually effect or produce it. True knowledge, then, is the practical activity of producing something, of discovering then controling the conditions of its possibility. Knowing becomes a techne, a technique for producing things and, consequently, making truth.

Throughout this historical transformation of truth the human element increasingly predominates, while the revealing, active event of Being retreats into ever darkening obscurity. If poiesis as a 'bring-forth' allows humans to presume themselves the agent of this act, it nevertheless hinders their arrogation by constantly reminding them that to every 'bringing' belongs a prior receiving and a later giving. 'Producing' (from Latin=leading forth), while still acknowledging a prior something that is lead, connotates a kind of authoritarianism and typically Roman militarism. 'Efficere' (to make from) finally does away almost entirely with any sense of an autonomous, autogenous element in truth. Man, moreover, the 'homo faber', is the paradigm of the efficator, the model maker. Other things effect each other more or less metaphorically, whereas humans literally make things out of matter, which simply existing is in actuality no-thing. The seed of anthropocentrism planted in the Greek idea of Being as 'bringing-forth' is already well rooted by the time of the Romans. They may not yet have assumed the divine power to create all things in their own image, but they did succeed in reducing all things, all Being, at least potentially, to their control by understanding them as metaphors of their own action. When truth is effecting, to truly be is to be humanly made.

This early subjectification of the world, whereby the latter gets determined not by and of itself but according to the human subject, remains crude and metaphorical until Descartes. It is not at all accidental that the father of modern philosophy was also the first of philosophers to articulate the promise of technology. Only with Descartes' foundational project does technology first acquire the resources to make its promise of human liberation through the mastery of nature. Previously nature, although revealed as a force analogous to human production, retained a certain independence and was not itself a literal product of human making. By establishing the cogito as the locus of truth Descartes rendered all revealing, all bringing-forth into unconcealment a function of the thinking subject. Things are insofar as they can be known clearly and distinctly.

> Until Descartes everything at hand for itself was a 'subject'; but now the 'I' becomes the special subject, that with regard to which all the remaining things first determine themselves as such. Because mathematically they first receive their thingness only through the founding relation to the highest principle and its 'subject' (I), they are essentially such as stand as something else in relation to the 'subject', which lie over against it as objectum. The things themselves become 'objects'.[22]

Being itself becomes a literal product of ratiocination, which gets at truth by keeping attentive to the clarity of its own inner processes. Thinking, dwelling, building, those human activities that provide for a world and attend to truth by tending things transmute as their outward tendency bends inward. The technological domination of nature can promise

human liberty for the first time because nature now is completely determined by the thinking subject, is in fact a product of its own operations. The Cartesian domination of nature, strictly speaking then, means thinking clearly so as to achieve transparency of thought. Descartes' advocation of technology rests on a perversion of the old stoic principle: that freedom comes from self-control.

As already seen, Hegel, followed by Nietzsche, push the subjectification to completion. At the end of metaphysics humans presume to flex total authority over truth. True is what they will to be true; reality is what they create for the concrescence of their power; and Being is nothing more than the activity of willing. The history of Western thought shows several united progressions. It shows the flight of Being as event into oblivion; it shows the metamorphosis of truth into scientific and mathematical certainty; it shows the assumption of humans as masters of nature. At the end of metaphysics humans have ostensibly acheived divine omnipotence, standing as the creators of all things. That which is, is that which has been willed to be. But with omnipotence humans have come to experience the unspeakable loneliness of a monotheistical diety. Finding themselves authors of meaning, truth and significance they look in vain for a source besides their own purposeless willing to fill these. But nothing reveals itself. "It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself...In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence."[23] Essentially humans, as speaking, creative beings,

are the protectors of Being; their essence sends them to attend to truth by tending things. Where humans always encounter only themselves and in truth not even this, there remains no things for which humans can care. The world, things, humans, meaning, and Being itself disappear together leaving only nothing--nihilism. Human omnipotence terminates in impotent solipsism, in the painful existence of a windowless monad tortured by the meaningless play of its perceptions.

This roughly chronicles Heidegger's history of Being and its destiny as operative within Western thought. It may look incredible, certainly it is unverifiable. The concern though, to use a Heideggerian paradox, is not so much that the history is accurate and correct, but more importantly that it is true, i.e, that it contributes to meaning, to understanding, to the disclosure of how things presently stand. Although paradoxical, the distinction is valid. No one can contest the correctness of nuclear physics. Its conclusion, however, known to us in the form of atomic weapons cannot claim the slightest connection to truth. Yet Heidegger's contention with technology as the current exclusive mode of revealing does not arise primarily from fears of nuclear holocaust, collapse of the biosphere or the global alienation of people. These are, so to speak, by-products of the fundamental danger: the loss of meaning, the vanishing of truth, the absolute forgetfulness of Being. Heidegger's entire "confrontation with modernity" was a lifelong struggle to make sense of the confounding characteristics of the modern world. By making sense of it, he hoped

to disarm the danger "that humanity is not prepared for this world-transformation, that we are not yet able to arrive at a reflective, thoughtful examination of what actually is happening in this era."[24] Because the "meaning of the technological world conceals itself"[25], Heidegger had to think through and against it. From out of this ontological concealment he believed the physical, moral and social problems of the technological world naturally fell.

Chapter 3

A Brief History of the Device

Heidegger's history situates the first express articulation of technology's promise of freedom and wealth through the domination of nature at the moment when nature first reveals itself as essentially domitable. Likewise his history allows Borgmann's device to be situated in a wider ontological context and therefore be more deeply understood. This historical approach renders some the ontological peculiarities of the device less puzzling , though unfortunately no less troubling. And although Borgmann himself remains uncertain as to the fruitfulness, even the plausibility of the ontological historical project[1], the latter in fact assists his own more reserved technological determinism: that technology "as the manner we take up with the world" creates consumerism as a way of life.

Having announced grand promises at the first glimmerings of the dawning of the Enlightenment, technology had to wait some time before making good on them. Under Descartes' cogito' the world suffers its initial full-scale subjectification; nature, things and reality in general receive their being according to their relation to the thinking ego. In essence entities are true and distinct cogitationes. They

attain, however, an independence by virtue of the inescapable recognition of the ego that it has at least one cogitatio, namely the idea of an eternal infinite God, over which it cannot claim authorship. The fact that the ego finds in itself an idea not of its own creating prevents its absolute subjectification of Being. It leaves open the possibility that all cogitationes, although first realized through the methodical cognizing of the ego, are not in fact produced by it. At this point the will to power is not yet fully manifest to itself. The subject still acknowledges, albeit rather unconvincingly, the existence of an efficacy other than its own. When Descartes expressed technology's promise not only the scientific, material and technical conditions but also the ontological ones were still unprepared to meet it.

By Nietzsche's time, however, the metaphysical and the material had fallen in together and stood ready to complete the march. Leaps in scientific discovery and its consequent industrialization and massification of the forces of production could now deliver availability from the loose hand of Fortune to the surer grasp of humanity. Of equal importance, the death of God, the sponging out of the horizon, removed the last barrier to the subjectifying ego. The latter no longer measured the reality of entities against the standard of its thinking self. Now it produced their reality out of its willing self, which made valueable only those entities that facilitated its willing.[2] While the cogitationes of the res cogitans could attain reality only by virtue of their relation to it, the fact that they are distinct terms

in a relation staves off their complete assimilation. The valued entities, the volata, on the contrary, do not enter into relation with the res volans; they are simply willed by it. Nothing comes to be, that is, the will experiences nothing as real, good, worthy and truthful without its valuation.

Why technology is constrained to answer its promise with the device now becomes apparent. If the essence of technology lies in its drive to total subjectification, in its singular way of revealing that obscures and forgets the occurrence of Being within the intoxication of human efficacy, then the essential product of technology must be one absolutely humanized. Such, it will be recalled, is the commodity, that single aspect of a multi-faceted thing abstracted, elevated and reified because of the value it has for the consumer. The device produces a commodity by stripping away all other attributes of a thing save for the single one of value. Commodities and their consumption comprise the "professed goal of technology" because through them technology, which means metaphysics, reaches completion. Not only nature but Being itself succumbs to human domination.

Or so it appears. The technological will determines the being of commodities and proceeds to fill the market, formerly known as the world, with them. Ostensibly commodities replace socially and bodily engaging things as the ontologically preponderant entities. But this is only semblance. For commodities are less than ontologically substantive; they rely on their concealed machinery to produce them. As commodities conceal the true basis of their being, so technology in general, by

pushing Being ever further into the shadows cast by human efficacy, conceals the truth of unconcealment: the coming to be of entities through relations that bring about meaning. Borgmann rightly considers the device paradigm a pattern stamped in different magnitudes on all of technological society. The device's suppression of the truth of its commodity reflects the wholesale suppression of truth perpetrated by technology, what Heidegger calls its 'danger' (Gefahr). For Heidegger, technology is inherently dangerous, its danger having nothing to do with its intended or unintended destructive accidents, such as the atom bomb and carcinogenic pollutants. The essence of technology hides "not only a previous way of revealing, but it conceals revealing as such, and with it everything within which unconcealment, i.e., truth occurs."[3] Nothing less than the preservation of truth itself motivates Heidegger's attempt to initiate a 'turning' beyond technology away from purely scientific calculation to authentic thinking.

At first glance, Borgmann takes issue with technology for reasons less ethereal. He proposes reform to the technological order because within it meaningful things and the practices focused upon them atrophy. The device disengages people from the social and bodily connections that give depth, clarity and meaning to their lives. While Heidegger fears the complete forgetfulness of Being, Borgmann cautions against its increasingly unbearable lightness. The lack of gravity, solemnity and focus within the device paradigm trivializes life, politics and the real world. Neither meaningful celebration nor gratitude can survive the effortless atmosphere of commodious

consumption. Lives fragment, human excellence and virtue break down and the natural and cultural worlds slowly shatter into isolated shards, like those of an ancient painted urn, curious but meaningless. "In conpsumption we are getting so adjusted to the light fare of more or less virtual experiences and emotions that the reality of persons and things seems offensively heavy and crude."[4] Real people, meanwhile, "are losing their character and definition in the levity of cyberspace."[5]

From the Heideggerian perspective Borgmann's concern with technology might look suspiciously anthropocentric, refusing as it does to acknowledge Being apart from its human condition. However, the differences between their motivations are to a large extent nominal while the few substantial divergences of thought Borgmann takes from Heidegger rather compliment than contradict the latter's concerns. Both speak of the unraveling of a contextual world and of the disappearance of meaningful things. Insofar as Heidegger seeks to understand truth as happening within a world whose significance emerges from the interplay between the divine, natural and human gathered and instantiated in things, then Borgmann's emphasis on the perils of physical and social disengagement completes Heidegger's thought. For it is only a community of beings capable of appreciating shared meaning that allows for truth. Heidegger implies as much when he praises language as the house of Being, and therefore truth. But for whatever reason he remains loath to admit that this community is finaly a human one composed of often mundane, unreflective social relations. Similiarly,

although he writes eloquently of place, distance, building and home, he keeps decidedly silent on the basis of these. Obviously, the human body, the 'corruptible flesh', must underlie and condition them. Place exists only for corporeal beings who make of it a home by physically inhabiting it. One would expect Heidegger to have been more attentive to language here. Given the intimacy of meaning (Sinngebung) and truth, Heidegger would have done well to make clear their kinship to the body and its senses (Sinne).

"When Heidegger spoke of the rootlessness of modernity", recommends Zimmerman, "he should have emphasized that it is from our own corporeality that we have become uprooted and alienated."[6] Borgmann, by making just this emphasis, helps explain the retirement of truth. If truth happens only in a world which becomes meaningful through the social and bodily engagements it offers, then truth must suffer violence where devices disrupt these engagements. He writes:

> Within the postmodern lightness of being, the modal instruction of reality can restore its material force and with it our fundamental welfare—the full engagement of human capacities. We are essentially bodily creatures that have evolved over many hundreds of years to be mindful of the world not just through our intellect or our senses but through our very muscles and bones. We are stunting and ignoring this ancestral attunement to reality at our peril.[7]

So while Heidegger on the one hand mourns the decadence of truth and art and Borgmann on the other decries the enervation of human virtue and excellence, a single shared concern compels both to question technology. But is this concern warranted? The

recession of truth, the demise of art, the narrowing of man to one insubstantial dimension, do these in fact accompany the technological order or are they instead simply inflated fears full of sound and fury but signifying nothing? What proof exists to show that consumer culture truly vandalizes Being? One might answer, citing Keats, that "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" and that the technological order has fashioned an utterly barbarized aesthetic. Pre-fabricated, vulgarly functional architecture; pointless, insipid painting; strident atonal music, angry, self-indulgent verse have driven Beauty from the arts. But to call this degredation could say more about the reactionary unsophistication of the derogator than the actual status of Truth. Besides, "de gustibus non est disputandis". Still, the ravaging of the natural sphere, together with the quickly spreading decay of cities nominate this period as one of incontestable ugliness. Trash and refuse litter even the remotest corners of the earth. Pollution mars nearly everything terrestrial, while artificial light blots out for an increasing portion of humanity the splendour of the nightly heavens. "The trail of the human serpent", as Willian James has said, "is thus over everything."

Given the kinship delineated earlier between truth and understanding, the general lack of the latter within the technological order evidences the withdrawl of the former. Only a very slim minority actually understands how even the most common of devices work. Those knowledgeable in calculus and electronics can perhaps explain theoretically the functioning of a calculator. The rest simply use it without

comprehension, just as they do a microwave oven, fax machine or any other electronic gadget; they press the button and await the expected result. The slight extent of understanding can be measured when the expected result fails to appear. More often than not the user succumbs immediately to paralytic befuddlement. What room is left for truth when understanding becomes merely an alienated series of habitualized actions? Artificial intelligence may well now be possible, but only because intelligence itself has become for us an artificial, mechanical phenomenon.

Consumerism draws the technological concealment of truth to its extreme. While a scientist or engineer may understand how a device operates, no consumer can understand the commodities she consumes. This is so for the very reason that commodities are essentially incomprehensible. Ontologically they are only partial entities that hide both their origin and consequence. Knowledge of these aspects needlessly taxes the consumer and must therefore be eliminated if technology is to live up to its promise of liberation from unnecessary burdens. Commodities can only be consumed; insofar as they are understood they cease to be commodities, exposing themselves instead as one half of a device. No matter who consumes the commodity of a MacDonalds' hamburger, the truth of it--where the meat came from, the economic and political arrangements that allow for multinational companies, the labour relations within such companies, the destination of the disposable packaging--remains hidden during the act of consumption. As soon as this truth reveals itself the hamburger no longer

is a commodity consumable without thought. This volatility results from the ontological incompleteness of the commodity. Devices admit of truth, which fact allows Borgmann to understand and trace out their ruling paradigm. Their commodities, on the other hand, do not, and consumption of them can take place only in the absence of truth. For not only does consumption gainsay the original Platonic notion of truth as a bringing-forth, it also denies it as a production. Real in a consumer society is not what has been produced, which implies an origin, but rather what autogenously stands ready to be used up and discarded. Here productionist metaphysics implodes with the denial of production; the serpent has managed to ingest itself. Thus theories, such as Marx's, that try to explain commodities from the side of production fall short. They fail to see into the ontological essence of modern commodities, which magically appear to stand always already on order for consumption without having been produced. The consumer society forces open an unbridgeable gulf between work and leisure, production and consumption. Real life, the kind purported to begin after hours, takes place only on the latter side of this division.

The final and most damning evidence that truth has fled consumer culture leaving behind mere dissimulation manifests itself in the egregious injustices committed by that culture. Its distribution of goods, ills, rights and freedoms is nothing short of scandalous and no less the almost ubiquitous apathy in the face of it. What ethical theory can justify the fact that some 21 percent of the world's population command about 85 percent of the world's wealth, use

about 88 percent of its natural resources and generate about 75 percent of its pollution and waste. This gluttony of the developed, consumerist countries leaves the other 79 percent of people to share the meager 15 percent of the world's wealth and 12 percent of its resources. One-fifth of the total population suffers desperate penury, ekeing out an existence on less than a dollar a day. In 1960 this hapless group received 2.3 percent of the global income, to find its share decrease to 1.4 percent in 1990s.[8] Recent global trade agreements further exaceberate the inequity, by structuring the economy such that "84 percent of the benefits of the world trade flow to the richest one-fifth of the world's population, but only 0.9 percent to the poorest fifth."[9] Although their cut of the profits are slim to none, developing countries get an disproportionately large piece from a less desirable pie. Their plates are full with the worst of pollutants and jobs that the consumerist countries can export. What's more, they pay dearly for this dubious distinction. "In 1992, developed countries provided developing countries with $60 billion in nonmilitary aid, but during this same year the recipients of such aid paid $160 billion in interest on their debts to developed countries."[10] This disgusting state of affairs cannot be ascribed to the sad but inevitable fickleness of Fortune. As Thomas Walz and Edward Canda argue, "U.S. consumption levels have a systematic, largely negative impact on Third World development....[due to four structural reasons]: the effects of U.S. international debt, competition for scarce resources, influence of the evolution of technology, and promotion and

export of military equipment."[11] While nearly a billion people suffer malnourishment, over half of all adults in the U.S. struggle with excessive weight.[12] But they do manage to keep a tight belt on their largess, spending nationally as much on video games as on foreign aid.

One might conclude from this dismaying litany of figures that affluence breeds meanness. A less cynical conclusion, however, evokes the Platonic notions of goodness and justice as wedded to truth. If, furthermore, virtue stems from knowledge, then a society from which truth has receded will unknowingly perpetrate injustices of all kinds. Or as Borgmann admonishes:

> ...we must recognize that virtue, thought of as a kind of skilled practice, cannot be neutral regarding its real setting. Just as the skill of reading animal tracks will not flourish in a metropolitan setting, so calls for the virtues of courage and care will remain inconsequential in a material culture designed to procure a comfortable and individualist life.[13]

It is not therefore the case that evil has wormed into the heart of modern consumption, turning consumers into malicious hedonists bent on accumalating the greatest stock of private pleasures at the lowest price. Consumerism simply shuts out virtue and ethics. Of all things these most often and consistently impose discomforting burdens. Technology's promise of liberation, perfected in consumerism's ancillary pledge to convenience and carefree availability must ignore all onerous encounters with injustice. Because justice and virtue impose, constrain and confine, commodities must necessarily jettison them. With truth and beauty, goodness too gets shrouded behind the enticing veil

of consumption.

Yet what of the spreading movement of "consumer ethics" that attempts to introduce issues of social and environmental justice into the marketplace? Fair-trade coffee, ethical investment agencies and green consumer goods are just a few prominent examples of a much larger phenomenon claiming that consumption can indeed include ethics. The claim, unfortunately, does not hold. Whenever a consumer approaches consumption as an activity with ethical ramifications she deals no longer with commodities. Since justice requires knowledge of the truth of the commodity, i.e., its origin and consequences, the consumer concerned with justice concerns herself with devices. The ethical consumer ceases to be a consumer to the exact extent that she is ethical, because ethics demands conscious recognition of one's own participation in injustice. In adressing justice a person passes out of the twin gates of consumption: convenience and availability. As she nears the truth of the device the mirage of the isolated commodity evaporates.

Borgmann's theory of the device offers reasoned argument for accepting the initially extravagent claim that truth finds no place within a technological consumer society. The device upsets the seat of meaning--those bodily and social engagements that gather a significant world--and thus bereaves truth of a meaningful place at which to occur. Such talk of truth will come across as laughable in an age of unprecedented scientific triumphs so long as truth is thought of scientifically. No doubt science correctly explains the modern world, but it does not

deal in truth. Truth concerns itself with meaning, with gratitude, with care and with "Heimlichkeit", that sense of worthy belonging to and in the world. The absurdity, nihilism and violence presiding over the technological age imply its loss of truth. Enlightened departments in the humanities boldly trumpet the same. They have taken the battlecry for their postmodern campaign straight from the mouth of Nietzsche: "there is no truth, only interpretation." Precisely because we linger in truth's absence does talk of its concealment sound to us nonsensical.

Of course, it may be that modern humanity can get along passably without it. What kind of danger the absence of truth poses remains unknown. Perhaps, contrary to Heidegger, it poses no danger whatsoever. Nethertheless, without a 'turning' to take us beyond technology, or at very least a radical reformation, a la Borgmann, of the consumer culture, poet Seamus Heaney's premonition seems probable:

> My tongue moved, a swung relaxing hinge.
> I said to her, "What will become of us?"
> And as forgotten water in a well might shake
> At an explosion under morning
>
> Or a crack run up a gable,
> She began to speak.
> "I think our very form is bound to change.
> Dogs in a siege. Saurian relapses. Pismires.

We have always known ourselves as beings of truth, meaning and understanding. For ill or better, "Saurian relapses" might well be our future.

In Being and Time Heidegger finds meaning to rest on the fundamental ontological structure of humans: their essential ability and need to 'care'. Things reveal themselves when humans carefully, though mostly circumspectly, preserve them in their being. In the carefree realm of consumption meaning no longer has a fundament. As meaning, which formerly defined things, collapses, the things themselves become susceptible to any number of arbitrary definitions. They become commodities, ontological fragments of their original whole. The technological determination of commodities was shown to be the final stage of the human appropriation of Being. The paradigm of the device makes it clear that the more thoroughly the device divorces the commodity from social and bodily engagements, where care gets practiced, the more abstract and malleable its commodity becomes. At the final stage of technology consumption loses all contact with human physical and social reality. Severed from any kind of limiting connection to definite contexts, commodities present themselves as empty vessels awaiting an infusion from the consumer. They become mere signs or symbols that consumers consciously combine in order to construct their identity, fashion their selves and build their egos. "Thus the meaning of the consumer product," notes Schleuning, "is individually...determined."[14] But like a private language, subjectively determined private meaning is utterly useless. Not only does it fall far short of Heidegger's peculiar notions about the extrahuman essence of truth. It fails to meet the most basic of semantic criteria. "Ultimately,

goods lose all signification", write Tim Lang and Yiannis Gabriel. "From being repositories of social meaning they become black holes into which meaning disappears."[15] Truth, of course, immediately follows.

If truth is the event of Being coming to pass through entities, then its disappearance must leave an ontological vacuum: nihilism. Christopher Lasch warns, "it is misleading to characterize the culture of consumption as a culture dominated by things. The consumer lives surrounded not so much by things as by fantasies. He lives in a world that has no objective or independent existence and seems to exist only to gratify or thwart his desires."[16] Although Lasch describes consumer culture as narcissistic rather than nihilistic, the essence of his thought differs little from Heidegger's. For Lasch narcissism means the denial of a world external and irreducible to the self, a world that provides the grounds for a reality in opposition to fantasy. The narcissistic self subjectifies the world, effacing its otherness "in the unconscious attempt to restore the illusion of infantile omnipotence."[16] But in striving to negate all distinctions, to subsume all things beneath the self, or in Hegelian terms, to make Spirit absolute, narcissism winds up at nihilism. Nothing remains for an absolute Spirit. Its solipsism is simultaneously its universalism, both equally vacuous and incapable of generating meaning. Technological science, because it knows just what it can produce and, vice versa, produces just what it knows, makes knowledge at least in theory transparent and absolute. Thus it "adds to the prevailing impression that everything is possible. Like modern art, modern

communications and the production of consumer goods, it has 'cleared the air of objects', thus allowing fantasies to flourish unchecked by a sense of the intractability of the material world around us."[19]

A reductionist materialistic science concludes paradoxically in the immaterialism of technological consumerism. Idealism, a doctrine traditionally contrary to the hard empiricism of experimental science, ends up championed by it. As the world yields to subjectification, it looks increasingly like a mental phenomenon. In high consumer culture, the ecomony abandons material goods to handle information ("the information society"); power becomes a function of memory and computational speed, rather than physical might; and weapons, buildings and household appliances are ranked according to their 'intelligence'. The stuff of the world acquires the features of thought, becoming fleeting, disposable, spaceless, and capable of infinite combinations. Just as commodities push out engaging things, so images displace entities as such, resulting in what Heidegger calls the 'nihilation of things' (Vernichtigung des Dinges). Correspondingly, personhood, indeed life itself, assumes a neo-Leibnizian form as the discrete series of inner experiences or perceptions, either amenable to bio-chemical products or transferable to electronic means of storage. As the end of metaphysics, technology attempts the impossible experiment to empirically prove the most basic metaphysical principle: that the real lies beyond the physical.

Critics thus mistakenly charge consumerism with being anti-metaphysical, unphilosophical and aspiritual. The cultural embodiment of technology,

consumerism is rather the strange actualization of metaphysics. It necessarily entails the evacuation of real independent objects from the meaningful world, while it strives to reduce the latter to an extension of its own fanciful will. In the consumer culture reality only includes purchaseable commodities, which attain perfection when rendered completely available. But absolute availability can be acheived only in the synthesis of consumer and commodity. When the consuming subject can fully incorporate the consumed object, such that the latter fully conforms to the desires of the former, only then does consumption become a perfectly safe, easy and ubiquitous activity. At that point desire coincides with its fulfillment and will with its achievement. For this reason bio-chemical drugs together with its related psychology represent the summit of consumerism and thus metaphysics. By taking mind and mood altering pharmaceuticals, the consumer ingests the world and decomposes its otherness into mere elements of her private subjective experience, the sum total of which supposedly constitutes her self. The commodity of happiness found, for example, in Prozac announces the triumph of the will. Not only has collective humanity managed to abstract the nature of happiness from the whole of worldly existence and then redetermine it technologically. Consumers of Prozac individually exercise a will seemingly consummate; they will happiness and thereby have it. But when will and achievement perfectly coincide, willing must become a purposeless end in itself. Nothing outside the will can serve as its goal and telos. The will to power passes into the absurdity of the will to

will.

This very absurdity permeates modern consumer culture. Advertisements exhort consumers to consume simply for the sake of consuming. A survey of American teenage girls found that 93 percent of them rate shopping as their favorite activity.[19] Like the hoarding of money, consumption becomes a self-contained, self-perpetuating process that, because an end it itself, continues without end. This interminableness results from the disengagement, accomplished by the device, of the commodity from the context of human bodily and social needs. Such a context, existing outside the will, limits and focuses it. By dissolving the context in the solution of available commodities, the device intends to synthesize the consumer and the consumed, thus liberating the will. The synthesis is possible only by virtue of the ontologically anomalous essence of the commodity. Less than a full entity, the commodity can be consumed and incorporated into the consumer. Precisely at the point of synthesis the device as such must disappear completely. It must be disposable and forgetable. But being fully substantial, the device will always remain distinct and recalcitrant. Insofar as all true entities come into their being through that autonomous source called Being, they share its autonomy and irreducibility. Consumers have no commerce with devices because these exist concealed beyond consumption. The device derives its ability to conceal its truth behind the simultaneous disclosure of phenomena from the larger historical movement of Being away from presencing. Modern consumers can forget devices, the predominant true beings of the

modern world, only because Being languishes forgotten.

The paradigmatic technological product, the device receives its nature from the essence of technology. Heidegger dedicated untold hours of mental labour to uncovering and understanding this essence. He thought to have discovered it in technology's singular manner of unconcealing entities such that they remain concealed. Devices can put forth commodities only by neglecting the bodily and social engagements that make for meaningful lives. At the general historical level, technology accomplishes its peculiar revealing of entities only be neglecting a necessary condition for meaning, namely care. Technology sets upon entities, driving them into unconcealment rather than bringing them forth. Care implies a reception and preservation of something which presents itself, whereas technology demands a constant ordering and re-ordering of the stuff it needs to perpetuate itself. It is of the essence of technology to fail to recognize anything not reducible to its ordering; everything appears as mere raw resources for its processing, while the processing itself proceeds merely to more processing. Heidegger refers to this as a circulation without termination and consequently without objects.[20] Since objects need to stand and rest in order for them to be approached and preserved, their incessant shifting denies them their existence. They disappear, fading away into the abstract possibilities for the conditions of the technological order. Consumerism simply distills this essential characteristic of technology. Everyday the marketplace expands to encompass another commodity; nature, health, happiness, love and salvation all have their package and price.

Everyday, moreover, the speed of circulation increases, as witnessed by the diminishment of the temporal distance between holidays of commercial interest. Schleuning describes the consequent dematerialization of consumption:

> In the modern consumer society the final link between property and use, between production and use, between work and property is severed. Property becomes the ceaseless cycle of buying-throwing away-buying....The only imperative is to continously exchange the things you have for the things you do not have.[21]

Here the process of acquiring itself acquires supreme value. It is a completely subjective exercise that disregards objects to instead "fulfill internal psychological and emotional objectives."[22]

The proliferation of private property over the ages supports Heidegger's interpretation of Western metaphysics as the march towards nihilism. The extension of ownership over every aspect of being does not, as one might first suspect, reflect an increase in the objectivity of the world. Consumers are not able to patent and "claim owner status over unique life forms...as well as particular colors, fragrances, even sounds"[23] because these have just newly become real objects. Rather the universal extension of possessability points to the subjectification of all phenomena. Since Locke ownership has been understood in terms of the investment the subject puts into the object: "Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property."[24]

Possession is the appropriation on the part of the subject of those parts of being wherein it recognizes something of itself. Complete subjectification of the world implies its total possessability, and vice versa. That the greatest concerns regarding ownership today center around intellectual property demonstrates twiceover the subjectification of the world. Of all possible phenomena, intelligence most intimately belongs to the human subject. Its elevation to prime property suggests that the subject has succeeded in determining the world. This same elevation, furthermore, demotes real objects; they cease to be true property because they remain aloof and alien to the subject. These unpossessable objects no longer have any place and must vanish, for the ordering subject empties the world of that which it cannot have.

Metaphysics, technology and consumerism all begin with the denial of the autonomy of Being. They do violence to Being by refusing the time and place it needs to give itself over into truth. Metaphysics commences with the forgetfulness of the gratuitous nature of Being to ponder instead strictly the human element in the occurence of truth. Technology, rather than receive entities as they reveal themselves in accordance to their true essences, appropriates them as grist for its mill, grist that it alone has planted, grown and harvested. Consumerism circumvents care, that human pool of patience to which beings come for rest and truth. Gratitude, awe and reverence wither within the subject when the latter can experience only what it expects from itself. Humans have sought immortality in an ugly apotheosis that destroys all

that makes them human.

Technology necessarily entails consumption as a way of life because both unfold from productionist metaphysics. As Victor Lebow knew well, any system that only produces must soon drown in its own products. Having fully appropriated to itself the otherness of Being such that it could willfully determine all entities, technology had to deal with the threat of vast surplus. To avoid this danger it unmade things, producing instead pieces of its will which became disposable when unwilled. Consumerism is simply the cultural enactment of technology, the curious ontological economy that grows in the absence of truth.

Chapter 4

Turning Carefully Beyond Consumption

There can be no doubt: consumption has become imperative in modern developed countries. With three quarters of the industrialized population residing in urban areas, and the rural quarter tethered to this majority by myriad economic and physical divisions of labour, most denizens of consumer societies must look to commodities to satisify their needs. Mass urbanization, together with the productive alienation on which it rests and the social alienation which it exacerbates, simply crowd out most opportunities for involvement with engaging things. Certain unyielding realities, most obviously the lack of sufficient supplies of firewood, make it that the hearth must stand out as a curiosity piece within consumer societies. In this case, the range of options has almost no extension; either the urbanite consumes the commodity of warmth generated by the central heating system, or her pipes freeze. This kind of inexorable necessity would seem to hold sway over nearly all areas of urban life. But it is important to differentiate necessities. While subsistence farming as a viable mode of existence cannot possibly be practiced by mass urban populations, this need not imply their abject enslavement to supermarkets. In China, for example, city-dwellers grow a substantial

portion of the nation's food at home. The same could happen in full-blown consumer societies, but artificially inexpensive food costs effectively preclude it[1]. Such societies will continue to consider gardening purely a leisure activity, so long as its total labour produces an output of market value utterly paltry in comparison to what equal time spent at wage labour would produce. So here, in the absence of unalterable physical constraints, there nevertheless exist certain strong economic compulsions.

The consumption imperative does not simply compel; it also commands. By 1989 companies spent per annum about $120 US for every living man, woman and child on advertising and seductive packaging.[2] Advertisements long ago abandoned their pedagogic role of providers of product information. As they invade every corner of public and private life--from elementary schools to high-tech telephones that throw quick commercial jabs out from their small digital screens--they grow more forthright, indeed forceful. "Buy now!" is just one of many repeated orders barked out by billboards, televisions, magazines and other ranking officers of the marketing military.

The final conquest of consumerism goes to the neoclassical economists, who have succeeded in turning a commanding necessity into a virtue. They portray consumption as the pillars upholding economic and social order, without the support of which the whole magnificent edifice of civilization would tumble into ruin. When consuming, the consumer supposedly enacts her species-being, fortifies the foundations of society, betters and beautifies the structures, relations and processes which go to construct the

global village. Thus we have to, are ordered to and, at last, rightfully ought to consume.

But what temper of hardness does this determinism have? What in the foregoing ontological survey of consumer culture may serve to counter the consumption imperative? Neither Borgmann nor Heidegger advocate resignation in the face of the 'unworldly' and rapid changes, or call them assualts, we moderns feel ourselves sustaining. Both maintain that we can in fact exercise freedom that transcends and defies the technological consumer order. Given all the material realities of consumer culture, however, it is initially unclear just how vigorous this exercise may be.

At first glance, Borgmann's account of the device paradigm appears more permissive of individual freedom than Heidegger's historical project. Although Borgmann firmly argues that the constitution of a device, and by extension its commodity, is an ontological rather than a psychological matter, he does not commit himself to the idea of historical epochs characterized by different ruling ontological Gestalten. He grants that technology creates ontologically unique entities, but denies that technology itself is the inevitable conclusion of a metaphysics through which Being unfolds. If we limit our use of devices such that they animate rather than eviscerate the bodily and social engagements with things that give meaning to our lives, then we shall have satisfactorily reformed the now oppressive rule of technology. Borgmann admits current reality necessitates that we employ devices and therefore consume commodities. He condones this insofar as it frees us up for the truly profitable engagements, in terms of human excellence and virtue,

that take place outside of the device paradigm. The reform of technology according to Borgmann, is really a resurrection of its promissory essence. Humans must foster their most fulfilling bodily and social connections; to the extent that technology aids this fostering, we use technology and consume commodities appropriately.

As was seen, Borgmann's thesis--that the farther we stray into the thicket of devices, the more lost we become to the real engagements capable of generating meaning--is correct. Any adequate reform of technology will have to return us to the trialhead of meaning, putting us back on the path which requires and rewards the full utilization of our senses, dexterity, motility and sociability in real time and space. But such a reform, at least as Borgmann conceives it, looks ill-fated. It forgets the mass urban circumstances that constitute reality for the vast majority of consumers. Ample everyday evidence supplies proof for Walter Benjamin's observation that "the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence."[3] With nearly half of all Americans regularly exposed to noise pollution, hearing loss is a spreading epidemic[4]. Similar affronts dull or deaden the other faculties of urban residents; air pollution stings the eyes and hinders breathing; chlorinated water blunts the tastebuds; continual exposure to light has been linked to high cancer rates and weakened immune systems in industrialized countries[5]. The typical consumer's senses suffer such constant battery at the hands of her environment that there can be no wonder that she would surrender her body to devices to be opiated and forgotten.

So too the social circumstances in large areas of most cities all but completely prohibit many possibilities for meaningful human engagements. Crime, the lack of pleasant public space, class and racial segregation structuralized in suburban development and inner-city decay; the mobility and transience of families, these all work to disengage and keep apart consumers from real people. For a sad many, the characters of a soap opera or situation comedy offer the most reliable and stable relationship (to stretch the word to point of rupture) in their lives.

In light of this, the examples which Borgmann gives as practices with potential to activate a reform of the device paradigm look at best remotely quaint and at worst a little offensive. He proffers wilderness, a focal thing, and running and the culture of the table, two different focal practices, as widely accessible centers of clarity around which a meaningful world can begin to recollect itself. But the eloquent challenge of widerness must fall on an increasing many ears deafened by the roar of traffic. To those born and raised in urban environments, the concept of wilderness is an entirely empty one, or else filled by the optical distortions of Disney and "The Wild Kingdom of Omaha". Nature speaks powerfully indeed, but only to listeners who have been attuned to her eloquence through direct experience. With each new generation conducted at birth into the land of concrete and kentucky blue grass, wilderness becomes a more alien, anomalous and ultimately useless notion. For most in the consumer society, the city stands as the rule, wilderness the exception. It requires patience and opportunity to understand and appreciate

exceptions.

No doubt running offers some participants the joys of bodily exertion, discipline and achievement. Some also make of it a social activity, running in clubs or with friends. But it takes only casual observation of the pained, flushed faces of many joggers to know that their effort does not come as a response to a call to focal communion and excellence. It is only too apparent that instead their heels heed the commands of fashion and health magazines. Exercise is in this case a commodity, albeit one more physically demanding than most. Consumers of this commodity attempt to buy with strain, and of course the appropriate health-store supplements, a sleek enviable body-machine, the kind that fetches praise and price on the market.

As a commodity, jogging requires not just physical expenditures, but pecuniary ones as well. Dwellers of derelict and dangerous quarters, and employees of the service industry forced to work long, exhausting shifts have neither the place nor energy to indulge in this consumption. Nor the time; "[m]any Americans earn so little that they cannot afford to give up future wage gains for free time. Nearly one-third of U.S. workers earn wages that do not lift them out of poverty even on a full-time schedule."[6] For this one-third even the seemingly low price of jogging is still too dear. Finally is his paean on running, Borgmann fails to recognize the ridiculous fragmentation of modern life on which this practice depends. He exports bodily engagements to the realm of leisure rather than trying to integrate them into the woraday world. Driving a private automobile to

one's place of employment is perfectly acceptable to Borgmann, as long as the free time gained is put to focal practices. But why not walk to work and forgo the run after hours? As Drew Leder suggests, by relegating focal practices to "a place away from work"[7], that is, seperated from the daily chores of Thoreau's 'getting a living', Borgmann may in fact inadvertently perpetuate the very problems he wishes to overcome.

The practice of the table falls prey to similar objections. For many, time, resources and energy simply do not allow for careful preparation and enjoyment of festive meals. Moreover, the food available to the greater population of a consumer society does not lend itself to celebratory care. Even the 'fresh' produce of supermarkets are generally bloated, flavourless, waxy fruits of some distant, unknown soil. One wonders too, what kind of resonance genetically modified vegetables may have. At best they emit but a hollow ring. This does not render impossible their careful preparation but it does mean that, despite this, they will never lose the slightly metallic taste of commodities. Until food ceases to be experienced as autochthonous to the grocer's shelves, it will remain a commodity, or if recognized as such, a less savoury piece of the massive device known as agribusiness.

At the end of these objections, the question remains: what can counter the consumption imperative? Borgmann claims that his espousal of focal practices furthers and improves upon Heidegger's insight that salvation from the danger of technology begins "here and now in little things"[8] for which we can care.

The realities of modern consumer society endanger, at least for a wide section of its population, focal practices more drastically than Borgmann acknowledges. If focal things and practices are supposed to sustain the vitality of an active reform of technology, one may despair of any substantial reformative success.

The reason for this is that a narrow focus on focal practices leaves the ontology of technology unquestioned. Because Borgman does not recognize technology and its devices as a definite moment within the movement of Being, he remains confident that the engaging non-technological world of things can co-exist within the disengaging technological environment. However, the circumstances that prevent focal practices, e.g., mass urbanization, communal disintegration, neglect of the body, desire for easy commodious consumption are not unfortunate accidents of modernity. Much more they are the direct and expected products of a certain ontology, of a historical mode of revealing which needs to be thought. Our freedom to practice, in other words, our freedom not to consume depends foremost on our freedom to think. Only by approaching technological consumerism as a specific moment in the unfolding of Being, a moment with both a fore and aft, can we arrive at a true measure of our freedom.

All this goes to say that human freedom can be understood and realized only in terms of the autonomy of Being. No single person, no collective group decides that the tide of population should rise and flood together into cities; that technological devices and the physical needs they serve should take on increasing abstractions; that community should be

overwhelmed by mass society, undergo dispersion and then be patched together through mediated, insubstantial means of communication. The modern assault on bodily and social engagements, which give our lives meaning and thereby give rise to truth, is understandable as the final phase of the forgetfulness of Being. Our material circumstances instantiate and thus perpetuate the ontology of the epoch. As Being retreats from itself and gainsays the autonomous event of unconcealment, beings reveal themselves accordingly. All entities, including the human body, look a product of human willing. Biotechnology, then, is of a piece with urbanization, alienation, decorporalization and the ravagement of the natural sphere. All these phenomena come to light within what Heidegger calls the current constellation of Being. The self-concealing shape of this constellation conditions the dangerous essence of these phenomena.

Insofar as meaning and truth are intersubjective, that is, are social occurences communicable between careful members of the inclusive community, Heidegger calls language the where truth obscures itself, the obscuration will manifest itself among the members of the community. What Iris Young describes as the social ontology of liberal capitalism, a read consumer society, again is no accident. That we regard ourselves and each other as essentially possessive self-interested individuals, atomistic consumers, independent buyers and sellers related to each other primarily through the jostle of the market is both at once the symptom and a source of the recession of truth. If the unconcealment of Being needs a

community of caring members, the concealment of this unconcealment needs the fragmentation of community, the isolation of individuals between whom meaning does not pass.

Why the event of Being would happen to conceal its truth and outwardly contradict its autonomy lies, according to Heidegger, well beyond our comprehension. We can only think it the destiny of Being to push forward into these dangerous nether-regions. Often Heidegger seems to reprimand the great philosophers of the past for increasingly distracting and worsening humanity's collective memory for Being. He would also seem to suggest some times that the human appropriation of Being results from a despicable bourgeois desire for security and comfort. Although the reader of Heidegger may feel tensions between what he writes and what he leaves unwritten, Heidegger never strayed from the conviction that Being unfolds through its ontological possibilities independently of human intentions and purposes. We may contemplate how one way of revealing follows the next and, by interpreting this succession historically as a movement that motivates itself from its inner destiny, we may allow meaning to enter and infuse the history with sense. But this sense is limited, for it cannot penetrate the mystery of why Being would ever initiate this destiny. This mystery is ultimately meaningless, to which we must remain insensible, ignorant, but most appropriately, in awe.

So while Borgmann's emphasis on the bodily and social nature of humans nicely compliments Heidegger's notion of truth and the historical essence of Being, these latter are more crucial to Borgmann's reform

of technoloogy than he acknowledges. Consumer society's march towards disengagement and social disintegration will continue to baffle us so long as we believe it to result from the aggregate free choices of many individuals pursuing the promise of technology. These choices no doubt push the march forward. But the freedom here mirrors that which Andrew Schmookler calls the 'illusion of choice' created by the liberal market economy[10]. Even in presenting to the consumer a seemingly infinite array of choices of goods, the market withholds from her the options of radically rearranging the marketplace, or not entering it at all. The market as such remains hidden, its structures exerting an unseen influence that circumscribes all available choices and thus curtails radical freedom. The same is the case with technology as the current mode of revealing. Without understanding its omnipresent, decisive ontological structures, we will continue to be fooled by its illusion of choice. By dismissing the ontological historical project, Borgmann proposes a freedom analogous to that offered by the market. Within the technological paradigm, he argues, we have the freedom to engage in focal practices and cherish focal things. But because he does not see technology as a moment in the history of Being, Borgmann believes we neither can nor should exit the technological marketplace. He asks us to be responsible, selective consumers, whereas Heidegger more radically questions whether we ought to be consumers at all.

Thus Heidegger calls not for a reformation of technology, but rather for a 'turning' to lead us beyond it. This kind of talk would seem to justify

Borgmann's criticism that Heidegger does not adequately appreciate the benefits of technology. It need not, however, furnish this justification. The turning for which Heidegger hopes is not a willful turning away from technology as if to reject it. The turning is instead a dynamic internal to technology, such that its truth--that in essence it conceals truth by destroying meaning and forgets the autonomy Being--manifests itself. Far from denigrating or dismissing technology, Heidegger feels himself to be affording it the utmost respect. Only in thinking technology through to its essence can humans come to fully appreciate it. This appreciation, moreover, will involve greater reverence and wonder than any unthinking technological enthusiasm can muster. For it will recognize the truly awful event of a way of revealing that whilst revealing denies the very occurence of revelation. In other words, with the turning we will appreciate how technology as the contemporary way of truth threatens truth itself.

How this turning will come about Heidegger gives no clear instruction. Because it is essentially ontological--a movement whereby the truth of Being confronts itself--humans alone cannot accomplish it. Yet neither are we simply hostages to an irrational ontological terrorism. Our material world has reified and embodied the disappearance of truth through the technological infrastructures that defeat and often disavow the human body. Artistic creation, Heidegger suggests, can open a space in which the turning may turn. Art is, like technology, a way of revealing, but one, unlike technology, that lets beings be rather than orders them as reserves to be spent on purposes

alien to themselves. Through art the event of Being, truth, takes place. The literal meaning of this phrase deserves attention. Being, which is no-thing, takes place, that is, happens through real, material beings, in art. This does not mean that art hypostatizes or fossilizes Being; art itself is the event of unconcealment, it is truth. True art brings forth new meanings, new ways of understanding the world it reflects. How does this happen? Heidegger does not explicity answer. Recalling the previously established relation between truth and bodily and social engagement, we can begin to grasp the great importance Heidegger invested to art.

Few human activities demand the same mastery, discipline, and grace of body as do artistic activities. Indeed, these have probably served as partial criteria for determining what has and what has not been considered art in the past. From the holistic grace of the dancer to the subtle adroitness of the musician or painter, highly refined bodily engagement has, until the age of photography, always intimately belonged to art's perennial power and appeal[11]. Again, until quite recently nearly every kind of artistic creation stood as a pinnacle of a particular bodily achievement.

Even the poetical arts, which in their execution do not rely on any special physical involvement, begin and ever return to the body and the world of things that it inhabits. Conceptual poetry inevitably sounds flat and sterile, as it fails to receive its initial inspiration in bodily, 'worldly' awareness. True poetry, on the other hand, attains meaning by allowing the body to speak, to verbally explore its engagement

with things, to literally incorporate thought, which, as language, always rests in the expressive, sensing body. Poetry, no matter what its subject, necessarily abounds with metaphor, simile and allusions, the most powerful of which invoke physical objects, both animate and inanimate. Our knowledge of and connection to all such objects comes primarily through our own physical experience with them or their like. The more deeply poetic devices tap into this original source, the more eloquently they speak to us. Without its pulse from the physical body, most poetry would be indistinguishable from much philosophy, inasmuch as they both treat similar themes.

Christopher Lasch rehearses Heidegger's turn towards art as that through which the turning beyond technological nihilism may occur. Lasch stresses the need for humans to again create objects with their own hands instead of surrendering all creation to mechanized industry. By so engaging our bodies in non-alienationg creation, we shall regain a world of meaningful solid things that remain proof against quick consumption and disposal. Lasch writes:

> The only way out of the impasse of narcissism is the creation of cultural objects, 'transitional objects', that simultaneously restore a sense of connection with mother and with Mother Nature and assert our mastery over nature, without denying our dependence on mother or nature.[12]

Thus through the restoration of craftsmanship we can mitigate the alienation and sense of bewildered impotence that arise from our having to constantly deal with mass produced objects which we personally neither create nor understand.

This is undoubtedly important, but artisanry

is not yet art. The distinction leads to the second aspect of art that potentially enables it to provide the opening wherein the turning may occur. Not just bodily engaging, art is pre-eminently social. Something becomes art by virtue of its relation to the community, however loosely or tightly defined. The recluse may create extraordinary works, but until these enter the experience and judgement of others for whom they have significance, they are not yet art. Even the modern institutional theory of art, of course, readily affirms this claim. According to this theory, objects qualify as art when they gain acceptance and recognition by the community of artists and critics that constitute the contemporary institution of art. In traditional cultures the relevant community is far more inclusive and its relation to art more expansive. Here art serves to make vivid the shared history, beliefs and understandings of the group. It seeks to render meaningful the group's place in the world, its origins and destiny. This primary social, epistemological essence of art explains Heidegger's privileging of poetry above the other artistic genres. Since poetry both preserves and produces language, which is the source of meaning, truth, Being, it especially reveals the shared significance of and to a community of speakers. Language, for Heidegger, is the most significant shaper of communities.

Having reinhabited our bodies and meaningful sociality through art, we may then begin to dwell poetically in the world. This needed resettlement, however, will not happen by chance or by some new method of colonialism. What must precede and prepare

for it is thought (Denken). Thinking, we contemplate the long unfolding of Being. We survey, as it were, the expanse of its landscape and, seeing what lies on its far horizons, we come to learn how best to live between them. This spatial analogy, although it misrepresents the temporal essence of Being, is nevertheless instructive. We cannot leave at will our current technological location; for us now it is a valley immured by towering mountains without a pass. Yet understanding the geography beyond the encircling range allows us to settle and build within our valley in a sensitive, responsive fashion. In keeping with the analogy, the impassable topology of the ontological landscape that keeps us in our technological valley in fact opens up a space wherein we may live out our freedom. Seeing the mountains for mountains, and understanding that the world extends beyond them, we will inhabit our valley as if it were not the only place on earth. We will recognize that like ourselves, our freedom too is indigenous and tied to our ontological place.

Heidegger says much about technology, but nowhere speaks more lucidly than when he addressed the townsfolk of Messkirch, his birthplace. There he, without denying the autonomy of Being, neatly weaves into it human freedom. He attests that,

> We can say 'yes' to the unavoidable use of technological objects and we can at the same time say 'no', insofar as we refuse them to claim us exclusively and thereby distort, dismay and finally destroy our being.[13]

We can, in other words, settle within our valley, using what we find growing there to live, and yet not mistake it as the measure of creation. Though

how we move from metaphor to meaningful practice, Heidegger did not disclose to his home people.

The foregoing study of the device offers some guidance. Commodities are the ontological dangerous products of technology, insofar as they conceal their machinery and consequences. As was shown, commodities are highly volatile due to their partial ontological status. Knowledge of their consequences and origins, in short of their truth, transforms them into devices, objects which we cannot fully consume. To say 'yes' and 'no' to a device means to use it with full understanding that its very use intentionally conceals most aspects of its use. It means that, even if such use fails to require preparation, to have resonance and to show consequences, the user does not carelessly consume. Having exposed its ontological essence--its technological essence--the user comports herself with the device differently than with the commodity. She recognizes the device as embodied technology, i.e., the denial of the truth of Being, and appreciates it accordingly. She does not disavow the autonomy of Being, as would happen during consumption, where the commodity gets determined solely by the human will. Far more she affirms this autonomy by understanding that the concealing essence of technology determines, rather than is determined by, how and what humans produce. Her use, then, points up the truth of technology precisely by realizing its concealments. Heidegger's 'yes and no' to technological objects becomes here more specified. We can say 'yes' to devices, 'no' to commodities.

True appreciation of devices will lead both to wonder at the awful march of Being as well as to

selective, minimal use. Awe and gratitude will limit use because true appreciation entails the acknowledgement of a bestowal, of an element of devices irreducible to human willing. Contemplation of the concealing essence of technology also limits use by reminding the user that the consequences of use slip unseen into concealment. Insofar as consequences of actions have moral significance, the contemplative user will have moral imperatives not to consume and to use minimally.[14]

Of course, to forever keep up this ontological vigilance is most likely impossible. Here Heidegger's earlier notions of fallenness and authenticity prove servicable. I do not wish to try to defend an interpretation of consumption as fallen business and contemplative use as authentic practice. I want only to remind the later Heidegger, who often portrays instrumental reasoning as irreconcilable with contemplative thinking, of his earlier insights. Just as we must always again fall from authenticity, so we cannot stay forever contemplative. In his address at Messkirch, Heidegger wisely notes the necessity of both ways of thinking. So too with consuming; it is an activity we all must do in the technological society. It behooves us though, as the preservers of Being, to instead practice careful use.

An obstinate rejection of all devices technological just as equally denies the autonomy of Being as heedless, willful consumption. Both are blind to the peculiar ontological constellation of modernity. Both fail to see the current tragedy of truth, how in following its destiny it rushes towards its demise. To try to resurrect a former ontological

epoch is as forgetful of Being as trying to consume it. Being unfolds as it does, not as we want it. Thus we must question technology, search its essence in order to learn how to live within it. When through our questioning we come to understand it and disclose its concealing essence, we have entered into a clearing where the turning can occur. We enter this clearing as thinkers, not consumers. Once there we open and deck it as careful, ethical, speaking artists.

A final appeal to art as the saving power supposed to defuse the danger of technology must first look like a desperate stab in the dark, if not a defeated falling upon one's sword. Far from powerful, art has undergone such a thorough emasculation through its professionalization and commodification that it now appears a sorry and impotent spectacle. The high art, moveover, that critics consider to have retained a modicum of vitality is either, as noted earlier, assaultive and inscrutable, or greatly technological and frequently both. Modern art's political reclusiveness and wider social insignificance further condemn it to evident failure in the face of the titanic problems it is here implored to solve.

The very commodification of art, however, as with its sequestered existence, its abstruseness, its complete irrelevance to the goings-on of daily business demonstrate the all-pervassive danger of the times. If the notion of art as a leisure pursuit of the bourgeoisie or a fetish of the bohemian sect be abandoned for an understanding of art, not as a set of artifacts, but rather as the way in which

different ontological possibilities first actualize themselves, then an appeal to art ceases to sound so ridiculous. It is a truism that art both reflects and goes to shape the culture from which it springs. Even by this truism, to the extent that we truly understand the essence of modern art--a collection of obscure, alienating, self-referential-to-the-point-of-inducing-clausterphobia works and theories--we would understand the danger of our age.

But the truism itself is not as true as it is held to be. Art does not 'reflect and shape' a world of pre-existing things. Art has primarily to do with meaning, and meaning is not a quality that supervenes on indifferent entities. Rather entities first come to be through their meaningful relations within the whole context of meaning, which always already underlies all meaningfully revealed phenomena as their very possibility. Art, which makes the world meaningful to humans, in truth makes the world. When, on the other hand, art becomes incomprehensible, it undoes the world, the web of meaningful relations within and through which all possible phenomena are understood. The dissolution of world, or the 'real world' as Borgmann would qualify it in opposition to the proliferating virtual ones, is exactly what dismays both him and Heidegger.

Obviously, art so widely construed will not confine itself to picture galleries and concert halls. It will infuse those all activities of existence that open up a meaningful world. Thus Heidegger could regard building, dwelling and poeticizing all as equally artistic endeavours. Why call them all art? Does this not make art so inclusive as to become

ultimately vacuous? Not necessarily; for although the attribution of art to everything from gardening to child rearing may seem to trivialize art, such universal attributions can also point to the true essence of art. If this essence has to do with the meaningful emergence of a world, then art's essence has equally to do with care, which, it will be remembered, is the ontological structure of humans that allows for meaning. Wherever we practice careful attendance to entities, then, there also happens art.

And precisely here we must depart from Heidegger. For both historically in the development of individuals and always most significantly, we do not primarily care for things, as Heidegger would have it, but rather for Others. Our careful relations with our human intimates--mother, father, family--provide the first and most fundamental basis for meaning, one to which we forever return. These earliest relations are the initial fabric of meaning into which all subsequent phenomena are woven. The radical social essence of care indicates that art too must be understood as essentially social. This is as it should be, for meaning, as has been repeated, arises only among a community of meaningful beings--human beings. Given this, art can no longer be mistaken as an activity that lies outside the realms of politics and morality. In essence true art is an ethical practice, because it reveals the meaning of the community.[15]

It is safe, therefore, to conclude with Tolstoy, who could boast of some understanding of things artistic, that "the activity of art is a most

important one, important as the activity of speech itself and as generally diffused."[16] Artists, of course, carefully create more than they carelessly consume.

Endnotes

Introduction

1. Average hours per week of at-home television viewing in 1990 in Canada was 23.3 according to Statistics Canada, quoted in John Colombo ed. The 1994 Canadian Global Almanac. Toronto: Macmillan, 1993.
2. "In the United States, one of every four dollars spent and one of every six nonfarm jobs are connected to the automobile." G. Tyler Miller,jr. Living in the Environment tenth edition. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998.
3. See Benjamin Constant. Constant: Political Writings. Cambride: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
4. "In 1986 [Stanford biologist Peter] Vitousek decided to caculate how much of the earth's 'primary productivity' went to support human beings. He added together the grain we ate, the corn we fed our cows, and the forests we cut for timber and paper; he added the losses in food as we overgrazed grassland and turned it into desert. And when he was finished adding, the number he cam up iwht was 38.8 percent. We use 38.8 percent of everything the world's plants don't need to keep themselves alive; directly or indirectly, we consume 38.8 percent of what is possible to eat." Bill McKibben. "A Special Moment in History" The Atlantic Monthly. May 1998. p.60

Chapter 1.

1. Victor Lebow, quoted in David Suzuki, The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature. Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1997. p.21
2. Bill McKibben, "A Special Moment in History" Atlantic Monthly. p.57. Kirkpatrick Sale cites a statistic even more astounding: "according to the Worldwatch Institure, more goods and services have been consumed by the generation alive between 1950 and 1990, measured in constant dollars and on a global scale, than by all the generations in all of human history before." Rebels Against the Future. p.219
3. see Oxford English Dictionary
4. See Robert L. Heilbroner, "Do Machines Make History?" Technology and Culture vol 8 July 1967.
5. Albert Borgmann, Technology and the Character of Comtemporary Life. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984 p.51
6. See Martin Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art" Basic

Writings. New York: Harpers and Row, 1977.
7. G. Tyler Miller Jr. Living in the Environment. p.465
8. Borgmann, Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life. p.53
9. ibid p.55
10. ibid p.48
11. ibid p.125

Chapter 2

1. David Strong, "The Implications for Nature of Borgmann's Theory of Technology" Research in Philosophy and Technology vol 13 1993 p.225
2. Writes Miller: "By 1950, a holding company called National City Lines (formed by General Motors, Firestone Tire, Standard Oil of California, Philips Petroleum, and Mack Truck, which also made buses) had purchased privately owned streetcar systems in 100 major cities. It then dismantled these systems in order to increase sales of buses and cars. The courts found the companies guilty of conspiracy to eliminate the country's light-rail system, but the damage had already been done. The executives responsible were fined $1 each, and each company paid a fine of $5000, less than the profit returned by replacing a single streetcar with a bus. General Motors alone had made $25 million in additional bus and car sales by the time the case was tried." Living in the Environment p.324
3. "In the United States, sales of vehicles classed as 'light trucks' (sport utility vehicles, mini-vans, and pick-ups) outsold cars for the first time in history in November, 1998--capturing 50.9 per cent of the new vehicle market. In California, SUVs alone now account for close to half of new vehicle sales." Stephen Dale, "Baby, I can drive my car" The Globe and Mail, Saturday, September 18, 1999.
4. Borgmann, Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life p.145
5. See T.P. Hughes, "Technological Momentum" Does Technology Drive History?: The Dilemma of Technological Determinism Merritt Smith and Leo Marx ed. Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1994.
6. Neala Schleuning, To Have and to Hold: The Meaning of Ownership in the United States. Westport: Praeger, 1997. p.19
7. William J. Mitchell, City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995 p.167
8. Ray Kurzweil quoted in John Searle, "Can Computers Make Us Immortal?" The New York Review of Books April 8, 1999. p.34
9. Borgmann, Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life. p.40
10. Albert Borgmann, "The Question of Heidegger and Technology"

Philosophy Today vol 31 nos2/4 Summer 1987
11. Micheal Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990 p.268
12. Borgmann, Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life p.40
13. "Advanced economies as well as rapidly modernizing countries have been experiencing a rising tide of depression. As demonstrated in a study of nine different countries by Myrha Weissman and a cross-cultural group of scholars, not only are people sufferung from depression at an earlier age than previously...but people born after 1945 are ten times more likely to suffer from depression than those born earlier. Each succeeding generation since World War II has shown greater tendency toward depression; new research suggests that a quarter of the American population now experiences depression at least once over the course of their lives." Goodwin, Ackerman, Kiron ed. The Consumer Culture. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995 p.101
14. Martin Heidegger, "Brief ueber den Humanismus" Wegmarken. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967 p.345 translations my own.
15. Heidegger, "Zur Seinsfrage" Wegmarken p.391
16. Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Wort "Gott ist tot""Gasamtausgabe Abteilung 1 Band 5. Franfurt am Main: Vittorio KLostermann, 1977. p.206
17. Heidegger Wegmarken. p.311
18. ibid p.338
19. Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken" Vortraege und Aufsaetze. Pfullingen: Guenter Neske, 1954. p.143
20. Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" Basic Writings. p.293
21. Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity. p.168
22. Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics" Basic Writings. p.280
23. Heidegger, Basic Writings. p.308
24. Martin Heidegger, Gelassenheit. Pfullingen: Guenter Neske, 1959. p.20
25. ibid p.24

Chapter 3

1. see Borgmann, "Freedom and Determinism in a Technological Setting" Research in Philosophy and Technology vol.2 1979 p.85 and Technology and the Characterof Contemporary Life. p.40
2. "Steve Mann, computer science professor, University of Toronto...imagines wearable human-machine interfaces that create

a 'mediated reality' in which everyone is online all the time. He believes that the ultimate application of his technology will be to personalize reality. One day, he says, you will be able to filter out visual pollution--say, the rot of urban decay or billboards--by having the eye laser write pre-programmed images over your field of view." Steve Brearton, "Resistance is Futile" Shift Magazine, December 1999. p.31

3. Heidegger, Basic Writings. p.309
4. Albert Borgmann, Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millennium. Indiapolis: University of Chicago Press, 1999. p.218
5. ibid p.232
6. Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity. p.245
7. Borgmann, Holding on to Reality. p.220
8. Miller, Living in the Environment p.9-10
9. ibid p.715
10. ibid p.718
11. Thomas Walz and Edward Canda, "Gross National Consumption in the United States: Implications for Third World Development" summarized in The Consumer Culture Goodwin, Ackerman, Kiron ed. Washington, D.C: Island Press, 1995 p.330
12. "55 per cent of American adults, or 97 million people, are overweight or obese. It is no suprise, then, that at least 45 companies have weightloss drugs in development." Joshua Wolf Shenk "America's Altered States" Harper's Magazine May 1999, p.43
13. Albert Borgmann, "The Moral Significance of Material Culture" Inquiry vol 35 Nos 3/4 September-December 1992. p.299
14. Neala Schleuling, To Have and to Hold p.136
15. Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang, The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentations. London: Sage Publications, 1995. p.61
16. Christopher Lasch, The Minimal Self. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984. p.30
17. ibid p.222
18. ibid p.193
19. Suzuki, The Sacred Balance p.23
20. see Heidegger "Das Gestell" Gesamtausgabe Abteilung 3 Band 79. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994 p.35
21. Schleuning, To Have and to Hold p.22
22. ibid p.22
23. Minna Morse, "Patently Absurd" Utne Reader. May-June 1999, p.12
24. John Locke, Second Treatise of Government. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1980. p.19
25. Neva Goodwin The Consumer Society p.xxxi

Chapter 4

1. "U.S. residents spend an average of only 10-12% of their income on food (down from 21% in 1940), compared to 18% in Japan and 40-70% in most developing countries." Miller Lving in the Environment p.599 Annual farm subsidies in the U.S equal $29 billion and the global sum is $300 billion. see Miller p.717
2. Neva Goodwin et al ed. The Consumer Society. p.305
3. Walter Benjamin. Illuminations. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
4. Miller. Living in the Environment. p.320
5. Krista Foss, "The Light Bulb, the Hormone and Cancer" Globe and Mail December 22, 1998 p.C8
6. Goodwin ed. The Consumer Society p.350
7. Drew Leder, "The Rule of the Device: Borgmann's Philosophy of Technology" Philosophy Today. Spring 1988. p.27
8. Heidegger, Basic Writings p.315
9. See Iris Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
10. Andrew Bard Schmookler, The Illusion of Choice: How the Market Economy Shapes Our Destiny. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
11. Writes Brian Eno, one of the foremost contemporary popular musicians and composers: "But now I'm struck by the insidious, computer-driven tendency to take things out of the domain of muscular activity and put them into the domain of mental activity. This transfer is not paying off. Sure, muscles are unreliable, but they also represent several million years of accumulated finesse. Musicians enjoy drawing on that finesse (and audiences respond to it), so when muscular activity is rendered useless, the creative process is frustrated." "Overdubbed: When Technology Makes it Perfect, Art loses" Utne Reader. June 1999 p.39
12. Lasch, The Minimal Self. p.246
13. Heidegger, Gelassenheit. p.23
14. Gandhi, considered by some commentators as 'man of the millennium', never refrained from denouncing the ills of modern civilization. Already in 1910 he advised: "Whatever means and instruments appear to us to be beneficial are not going to be given up. Only he who realizes that there is more harm than the apparent benefit from a particular thing will give it up. I personally feel that no benefit has been derived from our being able to send letters quickly. When we give up railways and such other means we shall not bother ourselves about writing letters. A thing which is really free from fault may be used to a certain extent. We who are engulfed in this civilization may avail ourselves of postal and other facilities as long as we are so ungulfed. If we make use of these with knowledge

and understanding we shall not go crazy over them, and instead of increasing our preoccupations we shall gradually reduce them. He who will understand this will not be tempted to take the post or the railway to the villages which do not have these. You and I should not remain passive and increase the use of steamers and other evil means for fear that these cannot be abolished forthwith and that all the poeople will not give them up. Even if one man reduces or stops their use, others will learn to do so. He who believes that it is good to do so will go on doing so irrespective of others. This is the only way of spreading the truth; there is no other in the world." from a letter to Maganlal Gandhi, reprinted in The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi: volume 1--Civilization, Politics and Religion. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986. p.336

15. Leo Tolstoy writes in What is Art? p.189 "Art is not a pleasure, a solace, or an amusement; art is a great matter. Art is an organ of human life, transmitting man's reasonable perception into feeling. In our age the common religious perception of men is the consciousness of the brotherhood of man--we know that the well-being of man lies in union with his fellow men. True science should indicate the various methods of applying this consciousness to life. Art should transform this percpetion into feeling."

16. ibid, p.52

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